



SAMPLE MEDIA COVERAGE
APRIL 2015 – MARCH 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>New York Times</i> , November 26, 2015, “From Indonesia, a Muslim Challenge to the Ideology of the Islamic State”	1
<i>Strategic Review</i> , April 2015, “How Islam Learned to Adapt in Nusantara”	6
<i>Jakarta Foreign Correspondents Club</i> , May 27, 2015, “Proffering the Values of Indonesian Islamic Civilization as a Contribution Towards Peace and Harmony Among the World Community”	18
<i>Al-Arab</i> , June 5, 2015, “European Expert on Islamist Groups: ‘The Interests of Ankara and Washington Prevent Them From Eliminating ISIS’”	22
<i>Al-Ahram</i> , June 11, 2015, “Indonesian Islam”	26
<i>Al-Arab</i> , June 15, 2015, “Political Horizons for Indonesian Islam”	29
<i>Jakarta Post</i> , July 5, 2015, “View Point: A respectful Ramadhan in the spirit of Islam Nusantara”	32
<i>Jakarta Post</i> , July 9, 2015, “Lukman touts moderate, local version of Islam”	35
<i>Tempo</i> , July 20, 2015, “Islam Nusantara, special Ramadan issue”	37
<i>LibForAll Foundation / IIQS</i> , August 2015, “Historic Nahdlatul Ulama Congress a Battleground Between Opposing Forces”	54
<i>Liputan 6</i> , August 1, 2015, “Ki Yusuf: NU Congress Guarded by Thousands of Angels and Spirits”	71
<i>Partnership for Peace Consortium</i> , August 3, 2015, “Tabletop exercise takes whole of society approach to foreign terrorist fighter threat”	74
<i>Spiegel</i> , August 13, 2015, “Indonesia’s Secret: In the Kingdom of Gentle Islam”	78
<i>Jakarta Post</i> , August 24, 2015, “Islam Nusantara can protect RI from fundamentalism”	86
<i>Jakarta Post</i> , August 28, 2015, “New MUI chairman to embrace beleaguered minority groups”	88
<i>Weekly Standard</i> , September 14, 2015, “Among the Believers”	90
<i>Independent</i> , November 27, 2015, “Indonesia provides a vision of a peaceful post-Islamofascist world”	93
<i>The Quint</i> , December 1, 2016, “How to Challenge ISIS Propaganda? Indonesia Shows the Way”	96
<i>The Huffington Post</i> , December 3, 2015, “World’s Largest Islamic Organization Tells ISIS To Get Lost”	99
<i>Mint Press News</i> , December 4, 2015, “World’s Largest Islamic Organization Tells ISIS To Get Lost”	102
<i>Anti Media</i> , December 5, 2015, “The World’s Largest Muslim Group Has Been Opposing Radical Islam for 90 Years”	105
<i>Channel News Asia</i> , December 10, 2016, “Indonesia’s largest Muslim group joins battle against radical Islam”	107
<i>The Boston Globe</i> , December 11, 2015, “Moderate Muslims reclaim their faith”	109
<i>The Australian</i> , December 12, 2015, “Nahdlatul Ulama: Indonesia’s antidote to Islamism’s feral fringe”	111
<i>The Atlantic</i> , January 3, 2016, “ISIS in the World’s Largest Muslim Country”	113
<i>New Mandala</i> , January 14, 2016, “Daesh, Islam Nusantara and shades of grey”	117
<i>The Australian</i> , March 30, 2016, “Indonesian online warriors pulling the beard of radical Islam”	123

The New York Times

VOL. CLXV . . . No. 57,062

© 2015 The New York Times

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2015

ASIA PACIFIC

From Indonesia, a Muslim Challenge to the Ideology of the Islamic State

By JOE COCHRANE NOV. 26, 2015



Muslims praying during Ramadan at a mosque in Jakarta in Indonesia. The country has the world's largest Muslim population. Nyimas Laula/Reuters

JAKARTA, Indonesia — The scene is horrifyingly familiar. Islamic State soldiers march a line of prisoners to a riverbank, shoot them one by one and dump their bodies over a blood-soaked dock into the water.

But instead of the celebratory music and words of praise expected in a jihadi video, the soundtrack features the former Indonesian president, Abdurrahman Wahid, singing a Javanese mystical poem: “Many who memorize the Quran and Hadith love to condemn others as infidels while ignoring their own infidelity to God, their hearts and minds still mired in filth.”

That powerful scene is one of many in a 90-minute film that amounts to a relentless, religious repudiation of the Islamic State and the opening salvo in a global campaign by the world's largest Muslim group to challenge its ideology head-on.

The challenge, perhaps surprisingly, comes from [Indonesia](#), which has the world's largest Muslim population but which lies thousands of miles away from the Islamic State's base in the Middle East.



A. Mustofa Bisri, the spiritual leader of Nahdlatul Ulama, an Indonesian Muslim organization that claims more than 50 million members, in the film “Rahmat Islam Nusantara” (The Divine Grace of East Indies Islam). LibForAll Foundation and the International Institute of Quranic Studies

“The spread of a shallow understanding of Islam renders this situation critical, as highly vocal elements within the Muslim population at large — extremist groups — justify their harsh and often savage behavior by claiming to act in accord with God’s commands, although they are grievously mistaken,” said A. Mustofa Bisri, the spiritual leader of the group, [Nahdlatul Ulama](#), an Indonesian Muslim organization that claims more than 50 million members.

“According to the Sunni view of Islam,” he said, “every aspect and expression of religion should be imbued with love and compassion, and foster the perfection of human nature.”

This message of tolerance is at the heart of the group’s campaign against jihadism, which will be carried out online, and in hotel conference rooms and convention centers from North America to Europe to Asia. The film was released Thursday at the start of a three-day congress by the organization’s youth wing in the Central Java city of Yogyakarta.

As world leaders call for Muslims to take the lead in the ideological battle against a growing and increasingly violent offshoot of their own religion, analysts say the group's campaign is a welcome antidote to jihadism.

"I see the counternarrative as the only way that Western governments can deal with the [ISIS](#) propaganda, but there's no strategy right now," said Nico Prucha, a research fellow at King's College London, who analyzes the Islamic State's Arab-language online propaganda.

And Western leaders often lack credibility with those most susceptible to jihad's allure. "They don't speak Arabic or have never lived in the Muslim world," Mr. Prucha said.

The campaign by Nahdlatul Ulama, known as N.U., for a liberal, pluralistic Islam also comes at a time when Islam is at war with itself over central theological questions of how the faith is defined in the modern era.

In a way, it should not be surprising that this message comes from Indonesia, the home of Islam Nusantara, widely seen as one of the most progressive Islamic movements in the world. The movement — its name is Indonesian for "East Indies Islam" — dates back more than 500 years and promotes a spiritual interpretation of Islam that stresses nonviolence, inclusiveness and acceptance of other religions.

Analysts say the theology developed organically in a place where Hinduism and Buddhism were the primary religions before Islam arrived around the 13th century. Indonesian Islam blended with local religious beliefs and traditions, creating a pluralistic society despite having a Muslim majority.

Indonesia today has more than 190 million Muslims, but also has a secular government and influential Christian, Hindu and Buddhist minorities.

Such liberalism poses a counterargument to the Islamic State, analysts said.

"We are directly challenging the idea of ISIS, which wants Islam to be uniform, meaning that if there is any other idea of Islam that is not following their ideas, those people are infidels who must be killed," said Yahya Cholil Staquf, general secretary to the N.U. supreme council. "We will show that is not the case with Islam."

N.U. has established a nonprofit organization, Bayt ar-Rahmah, in Winston-Salem, N.C., which will be the hub for international activities including conferences and seminars to promote Indonesia's tradition of nonviolent, pluralistic Islam, Mr. Yahya said.

N.U. is also working with the University of Vienna in Austria, which collects and analyzes ISIS propaganda, to prepare responses to those messages, which N.U. will disseminate online and at conferences.

A prevention center based in Indonesia, expected to be operational by the end of the year, will train male and female Arabic-speaking students to engage with jihadist ideology and messaging under the guidance of N.U. theologians who are consulting Western academia.

The film, “[Rahmat Islam Nusantara](#)” (The Divine Grace of East Indies Islam), [has been translated](#) into English and Arabic for global distribution, including online. The film explores Islam’s arrival and evolution in Indonesia, and includes interviews with Indonesian Islamic scholars.

In scene after scene, they challenge and denounce the Islamic State’s interpretations of the Quran and the Hadith, the book of the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings, as factually wrong and perverse.

The Islamic State’s theology, rooted in the fundamentalist Wahhabi movement, takes its cues from medieval Islamic jurisprudence, where slavery and execution of prisoners was accepted. The filmmakers accept the legitimacy of those positions for the time but argue that Islamic law needs to be updated to 21st-century norms.

Other sects and Muslim leaders have made this argument before. And non-Arab countries like Indonesia tend to have less influence on the practice of Islam, especially in the Middle East.

“The problem with Middle East Islam is they have what I call religious racism,” said Azyumardi Azra, an Islamic scholar and former rector of the State Islamic University in Jakarta. “They feel that only the Arabs are real Muslims and the others are not.”

Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and the main source of financial support for Wahhabism worldwide, has had more success in imposing its interpretation and has even made inroads in Indonesia. Analysts say a steady flow of money from Persian Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, supports an active and growing Wahhabist movement here.

There are also reservations here about the N.U. going global, rather than first tackling violent extremism at home. Indonesia has suffered several deadly terrorist attacks by Islamic militants in recent years that have killed hundreds, including bombings on the resort island of Bali in 2002 and 2005, and at five-star international hotels in Jakarta in 2003 and 2009.

The best known of the Indonesian jihadi groups, Jemaah Islamiyah, a onetime Southeast Asian branch of Al Qaeda, has been crushed, but splinter groups still exist, as well as other militant Muslim groups like the Islamic Defenders Front, which occasionally smash up bars and attack religious minorities and their houses of worship.

Bonar Tigor Naipospos, vice chairman for the executive board of the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace in Jakarta, said N.U.’s campaign applied equally to local radicals.

“They want to show to Indonesian society, ‘Look, we are Islamic and we have universal values, but we also respect local cultures,’” he said. “We are not like Islam in the Middle East.”

Others say the international public discourse has to start somewhere, even if it is thousands of miles away from Syria and Iraq.

Hedieh Mirahmadi, president of the World Organization for Resource Development and Education, an organization based in Washington that works to combat extremism, said that, according to open source data, supporters of the Islamic State were sending an average of 2.8 million messages a day to their followers on Twitter.

“Who’s going to counter that?” she asked.

“It’s what they are doing in Indonesia, it’s what we are doing in the U.S., and in other places,” she said. “You flood the space, and you hope people get the right messages.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/world/asia/indonesia-islam-nahdlatul-ulama.html>



How Islam learned to adapt in 'Nusantara'

Yahya Cholil Staquf

Indonesia's new fight against poverty

Anna Winoto

'There must be fairness in economic policy'

Jusuf Kalla

China and ASEAN: A new model in relations

Kishore Mahbubani

Volatile oil prices and fuel subsidies

Will Hickey

Kennedy, Dulles and Indonesia

Greg Poulgrain



AFP PHOTO/ANDEK BERRY

How Islam learned to adapt in ‘Nusantara’

Yahya Cholil Staqf is secretary for political and international affairs for the supreme council of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization. He previously served as press secretary for Abdurrahman Wahid, the late Indonesian president and NU leader.

Nusantara is a term used to describe the vast Indonesian archipelago that stretches across the tropics from Sumatra in the west to Papua in the east. It is a region characterized by immense geographic, biological, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. The word “nusantara” first appeared in Javanese literature in the 14th century, and referred to the enormous chain of islands that constituted the Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit Empire.

Nusantara is a compound noun derived from ancient Javanese: nusa (“islands”) and antara (“opposite” or “across from”). In his book “Negarakertagama,” written circa 1365, the author and Buddhist monk Mpu Prapanca described the territory that comprised Nusantara, which included most of modern Indonesia (Sumatra, Java, Bali, the Lesser Sunda Islands, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, part of the Malukus and

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika may serve as a model for establishing a true alliance of civilizations, capable of addressing a wide array of dangers that threaten contemporary humanity.

West Papua), plus a substantial portion of the territories that now comprise Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and the southern Philippines. As of 2010, this region was inhabited by approximately 1,340 distinct ethnic groups speaking nearly 2,500 different languages and dialects, according to Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics.

Indonesia's national motto – Bhinneka Tunggal Ika – was coined during the so-called golden age of Majapahit. Bhinneka means “different” or “diverse.” The Sanskrit word “neka” (like the Latin term “genus”) signifies “kind,” and is the etymological antecedent of the commonly used Indonesian word “aneka,” which means “variety.” Tunggal means “one.” Ika means “that.” Thus, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika may be literally translated as “Variative (ie, different) Yet One.” Within the context of modern Indonesia, this implies that despite enormous ethnic, linguistic, cultural, geographic and religious differences, the people of Indonesia are all citizens of a single, unified nation – the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

Yet the connotations of this motto are far more profound and universal in their significance than may appear at first glance. In fact, the concept, historical precedent and spiritual reality of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika may serve as a model for establishing a true alliance

of civilizations, capable of addressing a wide array of dangers that threaten contemporary humanity.

High among those dangers, of course, is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, known as ISIS.

The phrase Bhinneka Tunggal Ika first appeared in an ancient Javanese kakawin (book of poetry), known as “Kakawin Sutasoma.” Composed in the 14th century by Mpu Tantular, this renowned book promotes mutual understanding and tolerance between Buddhists and Hindu followers of Shiva. The phrase appears in chapter 139, verse 5:

*Rwāneka dhātu winuwus Buddha Wiswa,
Bhinnēki rakwa ring apan kena parwanosen,
Mangka ng Jinatwa kalawan Śiwatatwa tunggal,
Bhinnēka tunggal ika tan hana dharma mangrwa.*

It is said that Buddha and Shiva are two distinct substances (or entities). They are indeed different, yet it is impossible to regard them as fundamentally different (when one apprehends the underlying Unity of existence).

For the essence (truth) of Buddha and the essence (truth) of Shiva is One (tunggal). (The diverse forms of the universe) are indeed different, yet simultaneously One,

For Truth is indivisible.

It is important to note that the civilizational greatness attained in the East Indies archipelago (Nusantara) did not begin with the Majapahit dynasty. Archaeological remains and other historical records indicate that complex sociocultural systems had developed within Nusantara from at least the third century. And long before that, intense economic and cultural interchange had occurred, both among local populations within Nusantara and with the outside world, especially India and China. An economic boom stimulated by maritime trade is evident from at least the first century (Paul Michael Munoz, 2006), with an abundance of ancient Roman gold coins found in Nusantara attesting to the remarkable scope, and extent, of such trade.

Given the remarkable ethnic, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the region, and the dynamic interactions between members of different groups, Nusantara societies naturally developed a highly pluralistic outlook on life. Cultural and religious influences from abroad were quickly assimilated by Nusantara's highly adaptive, and flourishing, civilization. Thus, Mpu Tantular's observation regarding *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* did not emerge from a void. Rather, it expressed the collective wisdom of Nusantara, which had developed over the

Cultures and religions that appear to be widely divergent are in fact like colors emerging from a prism, derived from a single source of light.

المنارة للاستشارات

centuries and was already deeply rooted within the culture of a wide geographic region that lay at the crossroads of many ancient civilizations.

The value of this single quatrain of poetry from "Kakawin Sutasoma" is that it encapsulates – and helps us to comprehend – the worldview embraced by the Nusantara civilization as a whole, which underlies its remarkable religious pluralism and tolerance. Namely, that the universe arises from a single source, which constitutes the "spiritual essence" of all things. From this perspective, cultures and religions that appear to be widely divergent are in fact like colors emerging from a prism, derived from a single source of light.

This profoundly spiritual worldview emerged spontaneously among the people of Nusantara. Given the enormous cultural and linguistic diversity present within the East Indies archipelago, it was impossible to create, much less enforce, the relatively high degree of cultural, linguistic and/or religious uniformity characteristic of some regions of the world. The people of Nusantara concluded that they must accept the reality of this diversity, which confronted them on a daily basis, and hone their ability to coexist peacefully with others. As a result, they came to view cultural and religious differences as inevitable, and developed a civilization that emphasized attaining a state of harmony as the most effective way to maintain order within a complex social and cultural environment.

The arrival of Islam

From the seventh to the 10th centuries, Islam established deep roots in the Middle

East, from Spain and Morocco to western India, giving birth to a new civilization and countless works of genius. These territories underwent a gradual process of Islamization, and Arabization as well, in the Levant, Mesopotamia and the northern coast of Africa, as a result of having been conquered and subjugated by Muslim rulers.

In other words, military conquest was the essential prerequisite, and catalyst, for the development of classical Islamic civilization. Islam quickly attained military and political supremacy in the Middle East, which enabled Muslim rulers to enforce order and manage the community at large in accordance with religious doctrine and dogma. It was precisely in this atmosphere that the classical teachings (ie, interpretation) of Islam evolved, including *aqidah* (the system of Islamic doctrine, as related to Divine teachings); *fiqh* (the vast body of classical Islamic jurisprudence); and *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism, through which Muslims explored the spiritual dimension of life).

Although Muslims' interpretation of Islamic doctrine, dogma, law and spirituality was inevitably diverse, it was the responsibility of Muslim rulers (ie, conquerors) to establish order, which in turn created a powerful impetus to establish uniformity of religious doctrine and law, at least within an "acceptable" set of parameters. Thus, for purely political reasons, the question of religious "authenticity" became a central topic in the heated debates that often occurred among various competing schools (ie, interpretations) of Islam. Given these circumstances, it is no surprise that *fiqh* (often conflated with

Islam was forced to "surrender" to the prevailing local customs, and power, of Nusantara's highly pluralistic civilization.

Shariah) dominated such discourse, due to the central position of law in establishing order and governing the relationship between various members of society.

What about Nusantara?

Given the paucity of contemporaneous historical records, no convincing explanation has been provided to date of the precise mechanisms through which Islam penetrated Nusantara. A number of records indicate that Islamic kingdoms were established in Nusantara from the late 13th through the 15th centuries (including Jeumpa, Tambayung and Malacca), prior to the process of Islamization gaining decisive momentum in Java with the establishment of the Demak Kingdom.

Notably, virtually all academics agree that Islam spread throughout Nusantara through a "diffusive" and "adaptive" process that, for the most part, eschewed military conquest. Like Hinduism and Buddhism before it, Islam "dissolved" and was gradually absorbed into the prevailing local civilization of Nusantara.

In distinct contrast to other regions of the Muslim world (eg, from Spain to India), there is no record of the application of *fiqh* as a comprehensive legal system within the Islamic kingdoms of Nusantara. The resolution of

legal issues (such as crimes and disputes) was generally handled through the application of customary law, or *adat*, which differed from region to region. For example, to this day the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra retain a matrilineal system, distinctly opposed to the patrilineal system employed in mainstream *fiqh* interpretation of family law. And yet, this Minangkabau adherence to *adat* is accompanied, smoothly and unselfconsciously, by a strong self-identification with Islam on the part of the Minang people as a whole. Indeed, over time local customs (*adat*) throughout Nusantara have become flavored, or colored, by the influence of Islam. Yet there has never been any systematic and comprehensive application of “Islamic law, as defined by the mainstream of classical Islamic discourse, in public affairs.

In other words, Islam was forced to “surrender” to the prevailing local customs, and power, of Nusantara’s highly pluralistic civilization. To cite yet another example from West Sumatra, the Islamic law of inheritance, which favors males, was subordinated to – or at least compromised with – Minang customary law, in which land and houses are bequeathed through a matrilineal line. Islam thus experienced a softening of its “original discipline.” Likewise in Java, where many traditional rituals have been adopted as “part of Islam” after being adjusted to a lesser or greater extent through a steady process of assimilation.

The Islam that learns

Within the regions dominated by “classical Islam” – the Middle East,

North Africa, the Persian and Turkish cultural basins and much of South Asia – Islam arrived in the form of a “judge” by subduing, imposing order and adjudicating disputes. In Nusantara, Islam arrived as a guest and was later adopted into the family. In turn, Nusantara Islam developed a distinct character, which is quite different from that manifested by Islam in other regions of the Muslim world.

In the Middle East, for example, Islam is commonly viewed as a socioreligious-political system that is “complete,” “final” and authoritative, offering human beings no choice but to comply with the dictates of that final construction. In Nusantara, on the other hand, Islam is in a state of constant learning. For more than 600 years, its leading practitioners have carefully studied social reality, in order to ascertain the most elegant means to achieve their goals, while maintaining harmony within a diverse and highly pluralistic society.

Although Nusantara Islam is distinct from the Middle East model, this does not mean that it constitutes any form of heresy. Prominent *ulama* (religious scholars) and other Muslim leaders within the East Indies archipelago have been quite deliberate and prudent in ensuring that the manner in which they practice and promote Islam adheres to the fundamental teachings of the Islamic paradigm, follows its intellectual traditions and maintains an inseparable bond to the established references of classical Islam, anchored in the teachings of authoritative *mujtahid* (leaders within various schools of Islamic thought) from the earliest generations who lived in the Middle East. In other words, the model of Nusantara Islam is an absolutely authentic stream of Sunni Islam,

as preserved and taught by authoritative ulama.

The task of ensuring the authenticity of Islamic teachings, while maintaining harmony with the prevailing social reality, has never been easy. Nusantara's ulama have traditionally utilized two principal strategies to accomplish this.

The first is to ensure a balanced focus of attention upon the spiritual dimensions of Islam (tasawwuf), so that the animating spirit of religion, as a source of universal love and compassion, is not neglected when issuing judgments (fatwa) involving the formal/exoteric norms of Islamic law.

Nusantara's ulama introduced Islamic mysticism (tasawwuf) and a variety of spiritual brotherhoods (tariqa) established by their predecessors in the Middle East to local communities throughout the East Indies archipelago. Their teachings on Islamic mysticism elicited an enthusiastic response from locals and soon became the prevailing image/face of Nusantara Islam.

In fact, mysticism became the primary attraction of Islam to local communities throughout the region, for it is compatible with the long-established mystical traditions prevalent throughout Nusantara. In a *Strategic Review* article titled "Indonesia's Big Idea: Resolving the Bitter Global Debate on Islam," authors Kyai Haji A Mustafa Bisri and C Holland Taylor described the principal elements of Islamic mysticism, which have become integral to the spiritual orientation/cultural heritage of Nusantara and form its basic character.

Two brief citations may serve to illustrate the manner in which Mpu Tantular's concept of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika parallels the worldview

held by the renowned Persian poet and mystic Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207-1273):

The difference among men results from the outward name; when you reach the inner meaning you reach peace. Oh marrow of existence! It is because of the perspective in question that there is a difference between a Muslim, a Zoroastrian and a Jew. ... Every prophet and every saint hath a way, but it leads to God; all the ways are really one.

The Spanish-born Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240), who is often referred to as Shaykh al-Akbar, or The Great Master, expressed a similar view when he wrote:

My heart has become capable of every form; it is a pasture for gazelles and a cloister for Christian monks, and a temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Ka'ba, and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love, whichever way his camels take. My religion and my faith is the true religion.

Significantly, Jalal ad-Din Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi are two of the most authoritative figures within the realm of Islamic spirituality and mysticism.

It is clear that these spiritual insights provide "doctrinal legitimacy and protection" that not only authorizes but actively encourages the participation of Muslims in the affairs of a highly pluralistic society. This profoundly spiritual worldview also provides a psychological and emotional safety valve for Muslims, who might otherwise be disturbed by others' rejection of Islamic proselytism (da'wa) or their reluctance to



fully adopt the formal teachings and rituals of Islam. Due to their understanding of Islam as an “offer of salvation,” Nusantara ulama consider proselytism as an attempt to “save” others, which will only succeed if the persons concerned are willing. If not, the proselytizer has no responsibility for the decision of others to choose a different path in life.

The second strategy referenced above is to position Islam as an equal citizen within a highly pluralistic society, rather than as the beneficiary or carrier of a violent, supremacist ideology. Nusantara ulama generally believe that public affairs should be managed with the consent of all parties concerned. In Nusantara, Muslim leaders have rarely been burdened by the expectation or demand to impose Islamic

law on others.

Nusantara ulama creatively seek “space for maneuver” in regard to Shariah, to remain closely involved within the wider social arena, without abandoning their affiliation with, or practice of, Shariah itself. In the case of the Minangkabau tradition cited above, ulama utilize the Shariah-sanctioned practice of allowing the distribution of inheritance in accord with any consensus reached among heirs. Thus, local customs (*adat*) that might otherwise conflict with *fiqh* (Islamic law) are positioned within the “realm of consensus.”

This approach to Islamic law has served as the basis for Nusantara ulama to accept the secular state of the Republic of Indonesia and reject the establishment of a so-called Islamic

The model of “Nusantara Islam” is an absolutely authentic stream of Sunni Islam, as preserved and taught by authoritative ulama.

state, or caliphate. Because Islam arrived in Nusantara as a respected guest and not a conqueror, Muslims generally accept the fact that they are not the only party destined to determine the fate of society as a whole. Nusantara’s political systems – and particularly the relationship between state and religion – have traditionally reflected consensus among all the stakeholders concerned. Even Islamic kingdoms such as Jeumpa, Tambayung and Mataram have traditionally been regarded as the product of consensus among adherents of traditional law (*adat*), rather than the embodiment of a formal “Islamic state.”

In general, it may be said that the ability of Nusantara ulama to adapt to social reality without abandoning their own adherence to Shariah stems from the fact that they have mastered Shariah, not merely in the sense of compilations of Islamic jurisprudence but as profound legal theory. Islam teaches that the law must be based upon Divine guidance.

But Islam also teaches that in providing guidance, God’s purpose is never the pursuit of His own interests. God provides guidance for the benefit of humanity. Thus, anything beneficial to humanity is in harmony with God’s “objective,” and the purpose of Shariah itself.

Purification

Regardless of their ethnic or geographic origin, conquerors generally have similar anxieties and behavioral tendencies as they seek to promote their own self-interest. The most fundamental of these impulses is to ensure the perpetuation of their rule, in the face of overt or latent resistance from those who have been subjugated. Thus, it is logical that conquerors tend to be repressive.

Classical Islamic law (*fiqh*) is replete with such repressive dictates. One of the more dramatic examples may be found in the book “Kifaayat ‘l Akhyaar” (“The Satisfying Selections”), written by Taqiyudin Abu Bakr bin Muhammad al-Husaini al-Husni in the 14th century. Among the various dictates of Islamic law cited in this book is an explicit requirement that Muslims discriminate against non-Muslims.

In Nusantara, Islam never had to struggle beneath the burden of such injunctions. In the absence of foreign conquerors, there was no threat of resistance to a so-called foreign religion. Thus, within the 16th century Islamic kingdom of Demak, the sultan’s chief religious adviser, Ja’far Sadiq Azmatkhan, popularly known as Sunan Kudus, forbade Muslims to slaughter cows within the territorial limits of Kudus (in today’s Central Java Province), due to his respect for Hindus’ belief in the sanctity of the animals.

Another early propagator of Islam in Java, Raden ‘Ainul Yaqin, popularly known as Sunan Giri, was the main arbiter of disputes among his contemporary ulama in regard to Islamic law because of his profound expertise in the

“I follow the religion of Love, whichever way his camels take. My religion and my faith is the true religion.”

field of Shariah. Yet the best known of Sunan Giri’s teachings, which have become indelibly associated with his memory, are his teachings about universal virtues, which are sculpted upon his tomb in East Java:

*Wenehana mangan marang wong kang luwe.
Wenehana sandangan marang wong kang wuda.
Wenehana payung marang wong kang kudanan.
Wenehana teken marang wong kang wuta.*

Give food to those who are hungry.
Give clothes to those who are naked.
Give shelter to those caught in the rain.
Give walking sticks to those who are blind.

In general, the Islamic narratives that have long thrived in Nusantara are oriented toward the spirit, rather than the letter, of the law. Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence, as an instrument to maintain order) was not considered to be urgent because preserving public order was not the most crucial challenge facing local societies or their rulers. A strong cultural disposition to seek harmony served as the primary foundation, and guarantor, of social order. In such circumstances, detailed and sophisticated legal instruments were not required, nor was there any need for coercion to enforce such dictates. These circumstances allowed the proponents of religion to delve deeply and unveil the core of religious teachings, namely

spirituality and ethics.

**Harmonious civilization,
compassionate religion**

For nearly 2,000 years, Nusantara’s civilization has constituted a unique experiment and direct experience of the ability of human beings to live peacefully amid diversity. It is about prioritizing harmony with others, above one’s own self-interest; spiritual self-confidence, which allows one to experience and embrace new ideas and teachings; seeking nobility of character, rather than purely material achievements; knowing that differences of opinion (and religion) are not harmful.

Nearly all of the world’s religions have come to Nusantara without encountering resistance. The people of Nusantara are free to embrace any religion that suits them, and to abandon said religion without harm if and when they desire to do so. And everyone who becomes a citizen within the communal life we share is part of an indivisible unity, regardless of what superficial differences may exist: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

Within the civilization of Nusantara, Islam found its “heaven.” Islam was not burdened with worldly concerns such as rebellion or other internal and external threats. Islam was blessedly free of being instrumentalized to



AFP PHOTO/CHALDER MARYUDDIN

serve as a vehicle for advantage in conflict, because in Nusantara religion has rarely been regarded as a worthy cause for quarrel. Islam thus enjoyed the widest possible opportunity to engage in relaxed dialogue, with social and historical reality.

Within this nonpoliticized atmosphere, Islam has proved more successful at grounding its core teachings in public life than in many parts of the world. This is because of Nusantara Islam's willingness to empathize with others and engage in dialogue with reality, rather than seek to impose one's own understanding of reality upon others by force. The success of Nusantara Islam also stems from its conviction that religion should serve as a path to enlightenment for individual souls,

Differences of opinion (and religion) are not harmful.

and that Shariah should serve to promote the well-being of humanity, rather than function as a tool of repressive authority. In Nusantara, Islam was free to fulfill its mandate in the Koran: to become a source of universal love and compassion.

In our present era, both the civilization of Nusantara and the variant of Islam it has long nurtured are in a state of decline. This is due to a wide range of pressures stemming from globalization, including the spread of a highly politicized and supremacist understanding of

In our present era, both the civilization of Nusantara and the variant of Islam it has long nurtured are in a state of decline.

Islam. The memories I have tried to evoke in this essay – of Nusantara’s glorious civilization, and its unique expression of Islam – may be rightly viewed as a civilizational plea for help.

Yet it is simultaneously a reminder and an offer to the world – an invitation to imbue

social, cultural, political and religious life with love and spiritual beauty. It is a profound love and beauty that lies at the heart of our vision of an alliance of civilizations and stands within our grasp, should we elect to transform this vision into reality.



Proffering the Values of Indonesian Islamic Civilization as a Contribution Towards Peace and Harmony Among the World Community

Speech Delivered to the Jakarta Foreign Correspondents Club by

Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri
Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council
(Rais 'Aam Syuriah PBNU)

May 28, 2015

Regarding the Roots of Global Extremism and Islamophobia

Centuries of conflict have left deep scars upon the collective psyche of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, in many parts of the world. The spread of Islamist extremism and terror, in recent decades, have revived and exacerbated this ancient trauma. And although this long history of conflict is inextricably tied to military and political rivalries—rather than the substantive teachings of religion—the fact remains that Muslims and non-Muslims alike have been deeply enmeshed in nearly fourteen centuries of armed conflict.

This, in turn, has led to a biased perception—characterized by widespread stereotyping, unfounded generalizations and prejudice—among Muslims regarding non-Muslims, and vice versa. As a result, conflicts that have nothing to do with the substantive teachings of religion are often attributed to religion itself.

The spread of a shallow understanding of Islam renders this situation critical, as highly vocal elements within the Muslim population at large (i.e., extremist groups) justify their harsh and often savage behavior by claiming to act in accord with God's commands, although they are grievously mistaken.

According to the Sunni view of Islam, every aspect and expression of religion should be imbued with *rahmah* (love and compassion) and foster the perfection of human nature, as expressed through sublime moral character (*akhlaqul karima*). This may be achieved—in fact, *may only be achieved*—if one's understanding and practice of the exoteric norms of religion (such as ritual prayer, fasting, etc.) is augmented by a full grasp of its inner, spiritual dimension.

When Muslim extremists act in ways that contradict the substantive teachings of religion—while loudly claiming to represent the true teachings of Islam—it is only natural that many non-Muslims will take these extremists at their word and develop (or, in light of history, “rediscover”) an aversion towards Islam itself.

Developing a Strategy to Address Islamist Extremism and Islamophobia

Certain steps are essential to address this complex and deep-rooted problem:

1. Recognize that efforts to defeat religious extremism are inseparable from, and integral to, efforts to create a just and peaceful world order;
2. Marginalize and discredit Islamist ideology—which arises from a superficial understanding of religion, and simultaneously seeks to render Muslims’ understanding of Islam more shallow—by disseminating the teachings of *ulama* (religious scholars) who grasp the profound essence of religion and its fundamental message of *rahmah* (universal love and compassion)—viz., *ahlus sunnah wal jama’ah ulama* (traditional/spiritual Sunni religious scholars);
3. Consolidate and mobilize spiritual *ahlus sunnah wal jama’ah ulama* throughout the world, in order to guide Muslims to an understanding of Islam that is deeply imbued with *rahmah* (universal love and compassion), so that this view (of Islam as *rahmah*) becomes a powerful societal consensus among Muslims worldwide, and a force for good in the world;
4. Establish close cooperation between moderate Muslim groups and non-Muslims who hold an objective view of the issues at stake, in order to stem the rising tide of Islamist extremism and its mirror image in the West, Islamophobia.

Islam Nusantara (Indonesian Islam) as a “Capital Asset”

For over six centuries, Islam Nusantara has been carefully nurtured by extensive networks of Sunni *ulama*, who combined spiritual wisdom with detailed knowledge of Islamic law, and extensive engagement with the daily lives of local inhabitants in their respective environments. As a result, the Muslim populations that emerged in the East Indies archipelago have traditionally maintained a close relationship with Sunni *ulama*, and their lives have generally reflected the *rahmah*- (compassion-) centered teachings of Islam.

As a civilization, Nusantara (the East Indies archipelago) embraced and came to represent what experts have termed “the smiling face of Islam”—conspicuous for its tolerance and emphasis upon social harmony. This occurred because Sunni *ulama* provided religious guidance that emphasized a contextual and profoundly spiritual view of religion, while prioritizing coexistence with others who worship differently, and unity of the nation as a whole.

Indeed, the Nahdlatul Ulama played a vital role in securing independence and establishing the Unified State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) upon the harmonious foundation of Pancasila (i.e., as a multi-religious rather than purely “Islamic” state), the Basic Constitution of 1945 (UUD-45) and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity Amid Diversity). These founding principles of the Indonesian

nation state reflect the Sunni Muslim view of Islam, whose core message is *rahmah* and whose sole purpose is to serve as an unconditional blessing for all creation, by enabling human beings to rise to the state of *khalifatullah fi ardl* (God's vice-regent on earth, i.e., sainthood).

The Nahdlatul Ulama was established in 1926—following the Wahhabi conquest of Mecca and Medina—in order to preserve and strengthen the solidarity of Sunni *ulama* networks throughout the Indonesian archipelago, and support their traditional role of guiding the larger community of Muslims. Because of the Nahdlatul Ulama, “Islam Nusantara” (which we may define as the localized expression of Islam as a source of universal love and compassion, through the development of noble character) has remained vibrant among the predominantly Muslim population of Indonesia. Islam Nusantara represents a form of “spiritual capital” that may contribute significantly to the cause of international peace and security. Key elements of “Islam Nusantara” include:

1. An epistemological community, i.e., a large group of *ulama* (intellectuals who function as religious scholars) engaged in the continuous development of Islam Nusantara as a system of profound values, practically applied in order to address actual problems as they emerge from time to time, and age to age;
2. An effective social leadership structure, with *ulama* in the foremost position;
3. A mass following of more than 70 million spread throughout Indonesia (according to exit polls conducted during the 2014 national elections), with a high degree of cohesiveness that gives rise to, and expresses, the values of Islam Nusantara in daily life.

Regarding the Position of the Indonesian Government

Indonesia's government should recognize that Islam Nusantara—i.e., the calm and peaceful face of Indonesian Islam—is truly in accord with the teachings and example of our great leader, the Prophet Muhammad (saw.). Ensuring that the values of Islam Nusantara remain intact amid the challenges of modernity—including the spread of transnational Islamist ideology—is vital to the future of our nation as a whole. For the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, who must be protected from the threat of extremist agitation and propaganda, for the sake of national unity.

The Indonesian government would also be wise to recognize that the peaceful, pluralistic and tolerant view of Islam that has been dominant in Indonesia for all these centuries, is desperately needed by the world at large. If the government has the will, Indonesia may play a vital role in efforts to resolve the current global crisis, by offering Islam Nusantara—i.e., a profound understanding of religion, imbued with the values of *rahmah* and *akhlakul karima*—as a model that can inspire, and be readily embraced by, Muslim populations throughout the world.

Regardless of what position the Indonesian government adopts, in regard to the international crisis facing Islam, the Nahdlatul Ulama is moving to address this crisis, and will continue to do so, by nurturing and widely propagating the values of Sunni Islam. For example, the Nahdlatul Ulama is taking concrete steps to consolidate Sunni *ulama* throughout the world, and to establish collaborative relationships with like-minded individuals, organizations and governments worldwide.

Within Indonesia, the Nahdlatul Ulama will never cease or flag in its efforts to guide Muslims towards a pluralistic and tolerant understanding of Islam, and thereby safeguard the nation's well-being. Internationally, the Nahdlatul Ulama will not wait for others to act, before taking concrete measures to address the global threat posed by religious extremism. To briefly cite two examples:

- In Afghanistan—after a long and extremely difficult process—the Nahdlatul Ulama succeeded in facilitating the establishment of a diverse, multi-ethnic group of Afghan Sunni *ulama* who subsequently chose to adopt the name, “Nahdlatul Ulama Afghanistan.” These Afghan *ulama* agreed to embrace and adhere to the principles of *tawaasuth* (moderation), *tasaamuh* (tolerance), *tawaazun* (balance/objectivity), *i'tidaal* (justice) and *musyaarakah* (social solidarity), exactly as these principles are understood and practiced by the Nahdlatul Ulama.
- In Europe, the Nahdlatul Ulama has launched a pioneering initiative with the University of Vienna, under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Lohlker, in order to establish VORTEX—the Vienna Observatory for Applied Research in Terrorism and Extremism—and thereby develop concrete strategies to address the threat posed by Islamist ideology and movements.

These examples are merely the tip of the iceberg regarding what the Nahdlatul Ulama has undertaken to date, and what must be accomplished if we hope to “defeat religious extremism and restore the majesty of Islamic teachings as a source of universal love and compassion (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*), which represents a vital key to building a just, prosperous and peaceful world” (H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid from his introduction to *The Illusion of an Islamic State*).

We invite others to join us in this effort, which we hold to be in service to God and humanity.

WaLlahu A'lam. God alone knows the truth of all things.



Al-Arab (The Arabs)

London's first daily Arabic newspaper, founded in 1977

European Expert on Islamist Groups: “The Interests of Ankara and Washington Prevent Them From Eliminating ISIS”

by Muhammad Abul Fadl | 5 June 2015 | *Al-Arab*, London



Dr. Rüdiger Lohlker—a senior professor at the University of Vienna, who specializes in the study of Islamist movements in the Arab region and their international expansion—has told *al-Arab* that no official relationship exists between Washington and ISIS. However, they do share indirect mutual interests.

He added that the Obama administration has utilized the existence of ISIS—and its status as a “monster” within the Middle East—in order to achieve a number of foreign policy goals that have long eluded it. In other words, Washington has instrumentalized ISIS to gain the upper hand, both domestically and internationally, on several issues [including the U.S. administration's desire for a nuclear agreement with Iran].

Likewise, the Austrian expert on Islamist movements described the relationship between Turkey and ISIS as based upon “mutual unofficial interests.” Ankara has exploited ISIS to apply pressure on the government of Bashar al-Assad, in an attempt to destroy its power through the military force possessed by ISIS [and other jihadist groups]. That is why Turkey has turned a blind eye to ISIS' brutal behavior and covertly allowed its expansion in Syria and Iraq. The government of Turkey has deliberately permitted thousands of ISIS recruits to travel freely through its territory, in order to reach Syria.

Dr. Lohlker attributes the vast increase in ISIS' power and the expansion of territory under its control to the profound ignorance of Western and Arab governments alike. Those in positions of power [such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar] believed they were uniquely in possession of “the truth,” and a correct understanding of regional dynamics; in other words, that they could control and direct, or eliminate, anti-Assad jihadist groups such as ISIS whenever they pleased. In fact, these estimations were grossly mistaken. This has led to a great confusion among those who previously thought they could control and direct ISIS.



Belgium, Germany, Austria and France are among the countries with the highest probability of being attacked by [Islamist] terrorists.

Dr. Lohlker pointed out that Washington initially viewed ISIS as a threat primarily to the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria; to its allies in Teheran; and to Hezbollah in Lebanon. The American government is now compounding its grave error by joining Iran, Assad and Hezbollah in an effort to limit the expansion of ISIS. U.S. policy-makers have even accepted practices—on the part of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah—which would have been completely unacceptable under different circumstances.

Dr. Lohlker—who has authored many books on jihadist movements, and developed innovative methodologies to analyze their online and offline activities—told *al-Arab* that the strategy currently employed by the United States, Iran and Iraq against ISIS is ineffective and useless. The international coalition ostensibly assembled to fight terrorism has displayed no sincere intent to eliminate ISIS.

ISIS possesses a strange interlocking network of relationships [that combine religious fanaticism with the cold calculation of former Baathist intelligence officers], which have enabled it to expand quickly and easily in many countries, by recruiting both local and foreign elements. It has been notably successful in establishing its public image as simultaneously invincible and vicious towards enemies, thereby discouraging effective opposition on the ground.

An Invasion of Europe

As a world-class expert on jihadists' use of the internet, Dr. Lohlker observed that ISIS employs highly advanced technological tools, which help propagate and widely disseminate its image as a terrifying force. At present, ISIS has assumed a dominant position vis-à-vis other Islamist movements which, at one time, were more powerful than ISIS. These other movements' relative failure to exploit the potentialities of media has limited their ideological and geographic spread, as well as their impact.



Rüdiger Lohlker: “It’s necessary to overcome jihadists’ domination of the internet in order to neutralize ISIS.”

Dr. Lohlker believes that ISIS’ successful messaging is reflected in its ability to recruit thousands of Muslims from Tunisia, Libya, Iraq, Syria and many other Arab and African countries. ISIS has even infected the minds of many European youth. Nearly 5,000 Muslims living in Western countries and have joined ISIS, including large numbers from France, Belgium, Germany and Austria. This indicates that ISIS has the ability to penetrate local Muslim communities and to recruit average Muslims, especially those who feel alienated from the societies in which they live. ISIS exploits the vulnerability of such Muslims to attract thousands of enthusiastic recruits. As a result, the European countries of origin have become obsessed with ISIS.

Dr. Lohlker emphasized that he does not exaggerate when he states that ISIS both recognizes and exploits the power of the internet to a far greater extent than its enemies. “Look at the number of videos and photos published by ISIS,” he said, “and compare that with the number being transmitted by its opponents. As long as this asymmetrical relationship exists, the social dynamics will favor ISIS.”

He also observed that people should not be misled by their own reaction to ISIS’ online and offline activities, and how we, personally, view its social and psychological dimensions. Although we may condemn these acts and consider them bestial, it is obvious that from the point of view of ISIS, these brutal acts are achieving their desired result. ISIS must be deprived of its power to act—which actions are filmed and widely disseminated on the internet—in order to curtail its influence in the Muslim world.

Dr. Lohlker told *al-Arab* that we may expect new terror attacks by extremists working for ISIS, on a scale equal to or greater than the bloody massacre of *Charlie Hebdo* journalists in France. He indicated that the European nations with the greatest likelihood of experiencing such attacks include Belgium, France, Germany and Austria.

Varying Conditions in the West

Al-Arab asked about the situation in various Western countries with regard to Islamist movements, as certain nations have a strong and close relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. Dr. Lohlker replied that there is indeed great variance in regard to how European governments view these matters. The situation in Spain, for example, is very different from that in Great Britain. The lack of international consensus regarding the threat of Islamist ideology—as opposed to the obvious threat of jihadist violence—renders it extremely difficult for Western policy makers and the public at large to understand [the actual nature of the threat posed by the rapid proliferation of Islamist ideology and movements].

There is also a major difference in how Western nations view fighting terrorism in countries like Libya. Many European nations have completely “disconnected” from the rising chaos on the southern rim of the Mediterranean Sea. They fear engaging in wars that might trigger domestic blowback. Since many Muslim immigrants from North Africa live in Western European nations, there is widespread fear that members of these immigrant communities may turn into walking bombs.

With regard to the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and jihadist movements, Dr. Lohlker told *al-Arab* that most of these radical groups had emerged from beneath the “cloak” of the Muslim Brotherhood. This fact is obvious and no longer hidden. The primary difference between the Muslim Brotherhood and jihadist groups is that the Brotherhood still seeks to acquire power within the framework of existing nation-states, such as Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Syria. Most jihadist groups seek to destroy the global system of nation-states and ensure the ascendancy of an Islamic caliphate, even if such a goal would take centuries to achieve. ISIS has rushed headlong to implement this agenda and now regards itself as the sole legitimate Islamic sect, dismissing al-Qaeda, which did not seek to achieve this unrealistic goal in the short term.

Dr. Lohlker acknowledged that the Muslim Brotherhood has significant influence in Europe. He added, “Its influence is projected via [a network of] individuals [and front groups] that do not employ the name of the Muslim Brotherhood itself.” He emphasized that the Muslim Brotherhood, as an organization, has little future after its failures in Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia.

The Austrian scholar pointed out that “In Europe, the influence of Salafists is now greater than that of the Muslim Brotherhood. Salafists are simpler than the Brotherhood, as they focus upon the superficial and formal elements of Islam. I call this formal Salafism, which spreads easily in the West [due to the absence of Islam’s rich spiritual traditions]. The Muslim Brotherhood propagates a more detailed and sophisticated version of Islam to European youth, which encompasses a theory of government, financial and social systems, etc.”

He also observed that “formal” Islam is in many ways convenient for Western governments, and widespread in countries such as France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Salafist movements do not seek to integrate with European society. In that sense, they are “negative” (self-isolating) religious movements. **Dr. Lohlker emphasized the absolute necessity of Western nations identifying and embracing a new initiative to propagate ‘the tolerant face (version) of Islam,’ with its rich traditions of spirituality, pluralism and genuine acceptance of others.**

English translation (of Arabic) by Eslam Saad.

<http://www.alarab.co.uk/?id=53986>



تأسس ٢٧ ديسمبر ١٨٧٥ . أصدر العدد الأول في ٥ أغسطس ١٨٧٦ : سليم وبشارة تقي

Al-Ahram (The Pyramids)

(est. 1875), one of the oldest and most widely-read newspapers in the Arab world

Indonesian Islam

by Muhammad Abul Fadl, deputy editor, *Al-Ahram* | 11 June 2015 | Cairo



Some might imagine that geographic remoteness between nations is sufficient evidence that there will be scant political and human contact between their respective peoples, or that great distance militates against seeking to develop said relationships. The falsity of this notion is easily demonstrated by the case of Egypt and Indonesia. Despite the fact that thousands of kilometers lie between them—travel from Cairo to Jakarta takes approximately 20 hours by plane—after you arrive in Jakarta you will not, for a moment, feel as if you're far from home. This is because Egypt and Indonesia share

so much in common: socially, culturally and religiously.

This primary observation swiftly emerged from, and was constantly reinforced by, the numerous dialogues held during my recent visit to Indonesia. Wherever I went, I encountered Egypt: so many Indonesian graduates of al-Azhar University, who have mastered the knowledge of Islam and possess an excellent inheritance from that institution and their time along the banks of the Nile; the heavy street traffic; and a long history of sharing, and concretely addressing, mutual concerns. **This latter point is of crucial importance, regarding the development of Egyptian/Indonesian relations during the next phase of world history.**

Often, when I met a man who wields real power within Indonesian society—whether one of the *ulama*, or major figures within Indonesia's government and civil society—I met a graduate of al-Azhar, who welcomed me with an amazingly dignified sense of hospitality, and eagerly shared his beautiful memories of Egypt. At every meeting, conference and seminar I encountered skilled translators, from Indonesian to Arabic and vice versa, who were also al-Azhar alumni. These experiences made me realize how very mistaken are those who attack this prestigious institution, and fail to understand the vital role it can play in promoting the status of Egypt in Islamic countries, simply by requesting the assistance of its graduates, who are well-disposed to Egypt (and our moderate understanding of Islam).

This issue is of the utmost importance, as I sensed a desire on the part of many prominent Indonesians—constituting elite opinion leaders from many fields—who wish to strengthen both official and unofficial relations with al-Azhar. This should come as no surprise, given that Indonesia has the

largest population of Muslims of any country in the world. It also possesses a unique civilization characterized by open-mindedness and respect for others. Throughout history, Indonesian Muslims have been known for their peaceful and tolerant practice of Islam. They regard cultural diversity—both within Indonesia, and throughout the world—as an obvious and beneficial fact of human existence. Over the centuries and millennia, they have constantly evolved mechanisms for selecting and adopting new foreign values to enrich their national civilization, which is part of, and inseparable from, Islamic civilization as a whole.

The values of human affection are stunningly obvious in social interactions. Most Indonesians believe that noble character and virtue are essential components of religion, necessary both for salvation and to facilitate the good life they seek in this world.

This spiritual worldview both explains and legitimizes the diverse manifestations of religiosity, which vary from one region, and faith tradition, to another. Within Indonesia, the essential values of Islam are deeply embedded within local traditions and cultures. The immense diversity of these cultures and their manifold physical expressions—even though primarily local in nature—are derived from profoundly Islamic values, which underlie and animate the daily lives of most Indonesians. This is proven by the “five basic principles” of the Indonesian nation-state, or “Pancasila”: belief in one supreme God; a just and civilized humanity; national unity; a deliberative democracy; and social justice for all members of society.

This distinct culture has inspired Indonesians to create and widely embrace the term *Islam Nusantara* (“East Indies, or Malay Archipelago, Islam”). Prof. Dr. Abdul Mon’em Fouad—Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies for International Students at al-Azhar University—critiqued this term during our recent visit to Indonesia [for meetings co-sponsored by the Nahdlatul Ulama and *Kompas*, Indonesia’s largest newspaper]. He suggested that Indonesians refer to “Islam in the East Indies,” rather than “East Indies Islam.” Dr. Fouad acknowledged that each nation possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from others. However, the fundamental “pillars” of Islam remain identical for all nations of the world. Leaders of the Nahdlatul Ulama—the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, with 70 million members—acknowledged this point [without, however, abandoning their use of the term *Islam Nusantara*, whose rapid, viral diffusion through print, broadcast and internet/social media has severely discomfited Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated extremists].

It is next to impossible to visit Indonesia without noting the political, intellectual and socio-cultural role of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which was founded in January of 1926 in order to establish and preserve Islamic teachings based on the doctrines of *ahlussunnah wal jama’ah* (Sunni Islam) among the archipelago’s diverse Muslim communities. The Nahdlatul Ulama has played a key role at pivotal moments in Indonesian history, ever since its birth. The peak of its political ascendancy was reflected in the election of one of its most respected figures to the highest office in the land. H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid (1940 – 2009) served as Indonesia’s president from 1999 – 2001. Today, political parties directly affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama hold 20% of the seats in Indonesia’s legislature and have six cabinet ministers who serve the current administration. Indonesia’s Vice President, Jusuf Kalla, is also a member of the Nahdlatul Ulama.

Some people might be confused trying to define the Nahdlatul Ulama. Is it a missionary (*da’wa*) organization? A political organization? Or both?

In fact, by observing the discourse adopted by many NU leaders, one may conclude that it is both missionary and political. Political engagement, in the broadest sense of the term, often supersedes the “missionary” element. The Nahdlatul Ulama seeks to preserve and widely disseminate the worldview, and actual values, that underlie the “Indonesian model” of religious moderation and tolerance, as an integral component of its political role. **The NU now seeks to expand its field of operations and to project strategic influence on a global scale, in response to the shallow religious discourse propagated by many Islamic groups**, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, which has failed in all of its political experiments.

In fact, the Nahdlatul Ulama is currently battling on two fronts. It’s engaged in a war against extremist ideology and violence, which has begun to infiltrate Indonesia and affect many youth. About 700 Indonesian citizens have joined ISIS. Islamist extremism represents the greatest threat to Indonesia’s national unity and the tradition of religious tolerance upon which it was built. Thus, members of the Nahdlatul Ulama are making a tremendous effort to block the expansion of Islamist extremism—simultaneously isolating and discrediting it—by disseminating the inclusive values of “Indonesian Islam” (*Islam Nusantara*).

The second front is represented by the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS). The PKS lacks a mass basis. Yet although the Nahdlatul Ulama possesses a vastly superior moral/spiritual doctrine, buttressed by religious legitimacy and authority—and the tangible strength associated with its mass base—the Muslim Brotherhood has long been supported by external forces that render it more difficult [than ISIS or al-Qaeda] for the Nahdlatul Ulama to fight. Again and again the Nahdlatul Ulama has found itself in direct confrontation with political movements, and projects, that are heavily funded by Muslim—and in particular, certain Arab—nations.

The Nahdlatul Ulama has decided to confront this threat head-on. Opposing radicalism is one of the most difficult challenges facing the NU, as it seeks to maintain the tolerant face of Islam within Indonesia. Most Indonesians regard this “smiling face of Islam” as integral to their national character and a treasured inheritance from previous generations. As such, they refuse to allow the essential values that underlie their national character to be destroyed by Islamist extremism. When the Nahdlatul Ulama was established (in 1926) in order to preserve these values, it swiftly acquired a mass following. Again and again, this has been reflected in the form of enormous political influence as well.

The vital role of the Nahdlatul Ulama stems from its success as a mediator between the Indonesian government and its people. The NU can maintain a harmonious relationship between the government and the people due to its spiritual values, political engagement and mass following, which combine a profound understanding of Islam with respect for the inherent variety of Indonesia’s countless local cultures. That is why the Nahdlatul Ulama has consistently nurtured the values of *Islam Nusantara* (East Indies Islam) for over a century, and **is now poised to export its collective wisdom and experience throughout the world, for the benefit of humanity.**

English translation (of Arabic) by Eslam Saad.

<http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/405320.aspx>



Al-Arab (The Arabs)

London's first daily Arabic newspaper, founded in 1977

Political Horizons for Indonesian Islam

by Muhammad Abul Fadl | 15 June 2015 | *Al-Arab*, London



In last week's article—"The Search for a New Face of Islam"—I discussed the fact that various entities, capable of exercising broad geopolitical influence, have begun to search for a genuinely tolerant face of Islam that may serve as a shield against extremist currents, after the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood [and its long-term influence operation in the West]. This article is its sequel.

It is obvious that many Western leaders and communities are experiencing a problem with Muslims—not with Islam—due to jihadist violence and the subversive political agenda of Muslim interlocutors who were long perceived as "moderates." These pseudo-moderates sought to undermine Western culture, which has developed through the accumulation of historical experience over a period of many centuries. They have done so by seeking to impose a new lifestyle upon their European hosts, subverting and supplanting the West's hard-won values—such as individual freedom, tolerance, equality and justice—with their own lifestyle and values [which are based upon a narrow interpretation of Islamic law].

The spiritual essence of Islam does not reject the prevailing modes of government and social organization embraced by many Western countries, particularly those that promote the values of freedom, equality and justice. However, Muslims who claim to implement the "pure" teachings of Islam through widely-publicized acts of violence have provoked panic and revulsion towards Islam among the general population of the West. Fortunately, certain members of the Western elite who recognize the spiritual essence of religion, believe that Islam is more open and tolerant than commonly perceived.

It's very difficult to exclude Islam from Western society, given that millions of European and North American citizens now adhere to this religion. Hence, the search has begun for a Muslim group whose understanding and practice of Islam constitutes a model of civilized behavior that does not contradict the fundamental values of Europe and the United States.

The Western elites conducting this search hope to find an Islamic model that will not hark back the medieval period of Islam and/or of Europe itself, when the church dominated every sphere of life. This European history helps to explain the profound antipathy Westerners feel towards jihadist

groups that seek to propagate Islam with the sword, while neglecting the spiritual and humane characteristics of religion. It also explains the ease with which pseudo-moderate groups have infiltrated the corridors of power in the West.

[Ever since 9/11], emotional support has naturally flowed to any Muslim group that presents itself as “moderate” and willing to adapt to Western systems of governance. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these so-called “moderates” constitute a profound threat to the West, due to their specific [Muslim Brotherhood] ideology and worldview. This threat does not stem from their movement having been the fountainhead of most contemporary jihadists. Rather, it is due to the fact that these pseudo-moderate groups are pursuing a complex political agenda that will inevitably lead to conflict with, and within, Western societies, as they seek to undermine and transform these societies from within.

Western sympathy towards the Muslim Brotherhood results from three primary factors: first, the energy and commitment historically displayed by the Brotherhood, in pursuit of its agenda; second, the Muslim Brotherhood’s successful penetration of many key sectors of Western society; and, third, the fact that Westerners are still awaiting a viable alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood, which displays the true face of moderation and succeeds in convincing the West to provide the broad-based support required to defeat Islamist extremism.

Meanwhile, the author of this article has carefully analyzed the socio-political dynamics in Europe and North America, through extensive discussion with Western experts on Islamic movements. This socio-political analysis indicates that there is a profound reluctance, and even repugnance in the West, towards explicitly supporting any purely Arab-Islamic current. It has become an *idée-fixe*, within the West, that the Arab face of Islam is hopelessly contorted by extremism. Therefore, certain elements in the West have become interested in “Asian Islam,” which appears to be more moderate than Arab Islam; less inclined to export radical ideology; less dominated by extremist interpretations of religion; and possessed of a genuine and sincere tendency to act with tolerance.

The great Indonesian Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—which is also the world’s largest, with 70 million followers—has begun to expand its operations internationally, to fill this gap. The NU represents the most tolerant face of Islam, which is compatible with Western societies’ values and traditions, and shows no sign of wishing to engage in conflict with the West.

The Nahdlatul Ulama holds a view of Islam that its members describe as Islam Nusantara—East Indies, or Indonesian Islam—which emphasizes the adaptation of religion to local culture, and firmly rejects the ideology of extremist movements that have produced such a negative image of Islam in the West. This tolerant face of Islam, in Indonesia, accepts all the different religions and cultures that exist in the Malay Archipelago, and regards them as having a natural right to live side by side with Islam.

Given the facts described above, the profoundly spiritual and tolerant worldview embodied in the term Islam Nusantara has begun to expand beyond its local framework to a global environment. Many lines of communication have been initiated between the Nahdlatul Ulama and various Western governments. [Spiritual leaders within] the Nahdlatul Ulama have begun to establish working relationships and operational nodes in many countries, operating under the organizational name, “Home of Divine Grace (Bayt ar-Rahmah).” Each operational node propagates the model of tolerance embraced by the Nahdlatul Ulama—such as peaceful coexistence with others and respect for

individuals' right to privacy, including freedom of thought and conscience—and seeks to accomplish this by leveraging the profound humane and spiritual values that underlie and animate all religions.

Interestingly—based on information obtained from personnel who directly handle communications between Islam Nusantara, as represented by the Nahdlatul Ulama, and key Western institutions—a number of European and North American opinion leaders, including public intellectuals, scholars and media figures, have embraced the idea and gradually begun to disseminate an awareness of Islam Nusantara within their respective spheres of influence. They seek to prepare the local Western environment to accept this tolerant model of Islam [and thereby generate the societal consensus required to address the threat of radical Islam]. Many of these opinion leaders have become functional allies of Home of Divine Grace (Bayt ar-Rahmah), or even support it emotionally. Home of Divine Grace (Bayt ar-Rahmah) is operational in the U.S., Austria, Germany, Britain, Belgium and other countries.

During my last visit to Jakarta, I directly witnessed that Western governments, and civil society, have begun to provide tangible material and moral support for the Indonesian model. The idea that cooperation with Indonesia may help stem the tide of extremist ideology and movements has become more attractive to Western societies, for a variety of reasons. Those who are most aware of the ideological and political dynamics within the Islamic world—and the geopolitical stakes involved—wish to sever their ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, as evidenced by the recent actions of David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Those who support engagement with Indonesian Islam seek to:

1. Reduce conflict between Islam and the West by fostering a desire for coexistence among Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and by bridging the traumatic psychological and emotional gap created by extremist atrocities;
2. Leverage the role of Southeast Asian Islam, and of Muslims from this region of the world, who may play a positive role in Islam's engagement with the West. For there is a long tradition of Islam in Southeast Asia, developed by generations of brilliant Muslims active in many fields, who have prioritized social harmony and unity with those of other faiths, rather than conflict and religious supremacy.

English translation (of Arabic) by Eslam Saad.

<http://www.alarab.co.uk/?id=54762>

View Point: A respectful Ramadhan in the spirit of Islam Nusantara

Meidyatama Suryodiningrat, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Opinion | Sun, July 05 2015, 6:37 AM



Sunni, Shia, Sufis, Naqsyabandiyah. Add to that the Ahmadis, the Ismailis, plus a host of other Islamic-based ideological schools and dialectical sects and you have a vibrant melange of Ramadhan-related festivities this month. All in praise of God, extolling the virtues of community and family.

Life is beautiful. If only it were so easily true.

Ramadhan is one of the holiest months for Muslims everywhere, whatever their denomination.

It is a month where the virtues of tolerance, humility and solidarity are sought in the hearts of Muslims.

Yet too often Ramadhan has become a calling card to impose self-righteous piety — basically everything that Ramadhan and Islam are not.

While we often see the best examples of what it means to be a Muslim during Ramadhan, unfortunately it is also often a period where the worst examples are exhibited by those whose interpretation of “the religion of place” is to demonize others.

Yet this year, despite minor incidents (which should not lessen the gravity of the offense), Ramadhan in the 1436th year of the Hijra has been relatively heartening.

In a country where symbolism is a convenient political stooge to overlook the substantial core of religious teachings, soothing signs of unity have been more prevalent than in past years.

Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the two largest Islamic organizations in the country, agreed on the starting date of Ramadhan together, and will most likely do the same for the coming Idul Fitri.

Usually the source of a very heated yet completely unnecessary polemic, the stars seem to be aligning favorably over common ground this year.

In a month where demonstrative piety reigns — with restaurants keeping a low profile as if feeling guilty for doing business, and wine subtly being served in tea cups — Religious Affairs Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin turned the conventional rhetoric on its head by saying that Muslims should respect those who are not fasting and that warung (local eateries) should not have to close.

A move appropriately supported by Muhammadiyah and Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) chairman Din Syamsuddin, who said the statement might help delegitimize conservative groups who often “pressure” establishments that open during the fasting period.

“We, the majority, can respect those who do not fast and other religions. Do not force others to fast,” Din said.

Roving mobs in past years often seen attempting to close down entertainment spots or eateries during Ramadhan have also been less pronounced.

As a crossroads of trade, shipping and oceans, Indonesia has historically always been a cultural melting pot where diversity and nonconformity are the rule rather than the exception.

Hence, as a nation, we have embraced and dealt with the challenges of diversity for over a millennium. And successfully deal with it we have. Not by any force of assimilation or preponderance of one culture over another.

Managing those differences has become a daily socio cultural reality in the archipelago, yet sometimes it seems we are fighting somebody else’s battles that have little practical relevance here.

Islam, like many other faiths, has been waging an internal struggle since the days of the first generation of converts. A battle of power between the Prophet Muhammad’s successors, which persisted and eventually expanded to an issue of modern-day identity.

Issues of identity that eventually fuelled hatred and bred fertile ground for extremism.

In the 1980s, the Iranian revolution spurred a new Shia awareness, which was countered by

funding and efforts to promote Wahabism around the world.

An indication as to just how far these ideological battles within the Islamic world of the Middle East have impacted events in Indonesia can be seen in recent exposures from WikiLeaks on Saudi Arabian government cables.

Two cables in March and May of 2012 between the Saudi government and its embassy in Jakarta suggested their concern and efforts to help check the spread of the Ahmadiyah in Indonesia.

Another cable indicated potential efforts to influence public opinion against the Ahmadis with alleged payments to Indonesian media, including The Jakarta Post.

That is not to say that the Saudi government helped incite the wave of anti-Ahmadiyah sentiment, but it shows how divided we can be, easily swayed by ideologies and political motives that have no root in Indonesia.

As many Islamic scholars contend, there is no singular notion of Islam. From a socio cultural aspect there are various Islamic spheres of influence, and Indonesia in its own right has its own identity.

Noted Islamic scholar Azyumardi Azra described it as “Islam Nusantara”.

A brand that takes into account the empirical historical reality that Islam in the archipelago has evolved to accommodate the unique cultural precepts that permeate the country and express themselves in various unique forms different to the kind of religious bent that is a source of conflict in other parts of the globe.

In this Ramadhan there is hope that the diverse colors of Islam that make up the mosaic of our archipelago can be celebrated together.

Let the wars of religion remain where those battles were originally fought. Because Islam, of all shapes and sizes, has lived and grown in Indonesia in peace.

An Islam Nusantara that has minimized the significance of our differences and maximized the spirit to live in harmony and peace.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/07/05/view-point-a-respectful-ramadhan-spirit-islam-nusantara.html>

Lukman touts moderate, local version of Islam

Fedina S. Sundaryani, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Headlines | Thu, July 09 2015, 5:34 PM

Religious Affairs Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin said that the country should embrace “Islam Nusantara” (Islam of the Archipelago) and showcase itself as a Muslim-majority country with moderate views and an emphasis on religious tolerance.

Lukman said after a discussion on Islam Nusantara at his official residence in South Jakarta on Tuesday night, that the term did not refer to a mix of Islam and Javanese traditions. Instead he believes, Islam Nusantara promotes a synthesis of Islamic values and teachings and a variety of indigenous cultures.

“The teachings that have been implemented in our country for hundreds of years have manifested into something special that can’t be experienced anywhere else. This is what we now call moderate Islam, which is tolerant and full of Muslims who peacefully coexist with others — an Islam that supports human rights and the rights of women,” Lukman said.

Lukman further said that Indonesia, which is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, should promote its own version of Islam and become a model for other Muslim-majority countries around the world.

He also said the country needed an extensive dialogue to allow different Muslim groups to grasp the meaning of Islam Nusantara and to understand that the moniker did not, and would never refer to, a separate branch of Islam.

The term “Islam Nusantara” stirred controversy when Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the country’s largest Muslim organization, announced that it would be the theme for the organization’s 33rd congress this August.

Muslim scholar, and founder of the Liberal Islamic Network, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, said that the concept was not new but its adoption by the NU could be political.

“Although the NU was not being explicit, there was clearly a group that [it] wanted to criticize, and these are the people who have been promoting the concept of an Islamic caliphate,” he said, referring to conservative groups such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI).

In spite of the NU’s adoption of the term for its political purpose, Ulil said that Islam Nusantara was in fact practiced by a majority of people in the country.

“[Indonesian Muslims] are tolerant, easy going and rich. We [...] may not agree with each other but we rarely resort to violence,” he said.

He noted that early preachers of Islam in the country has made teachings in the Koran consistent with local cultures.

“Our Wahabist [a conservative sect of Sunni Islam] friends and members of the HTI all have the right to live here, as do atheists. All groups must have a guarantee that they may live in this country,” he said.

Even so, Ulil warned that the discourse of Islam Nusantara should not be muffled so as not to alienate other Muslim groups or religious minorities.

Despite claims regarding the compatibility of Islam with democracy and human rights, The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) published a report last month decrying Indonesia’s continuous intolerance of religions other than the Sunni version of Islam.

The report claimed that religious intolerance stemmed from the inability of government officials’ and law enforcer’s to separate their duties from their personal beliefs. The report noted several significant events such as the effective shutdown of an Ahmadiyah (a minority sect of Islam) mosque in Depok, West Java, in 2011, and the blocking of construction at the Nur Musafir Mosque in the catholic-majority region of Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, which has continued since 2011.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/07/09/lukman-touts-moderate-local-version-islam.html>

TEMPO

E N G L I S H

TEST OF FAITH

Tradition vs
radicalism over
Qur'an reading
style



Opinion

TEMPO, JULY 20-26, 2015

TEST OF FAITH

NONE of us knows exactly the melody used when the Qur'an was recited for the first time. And there is no answer to the question: did the revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad include it in the form of a kind of 'notation'? In movies depicting the early days of Islam, even the call to prayer is not musical, when Bilal bin Rabah announces it for the first time.

In these movies, Bilal—the sixth person to embrace Islam, according to Abdullah bin Mas'ud—climbs a small hill every time the call to prayer is to be made, and shouts it in all directions. In the time since then, the small hill has become the towers of modern mosques. In Bilal's time, the call to prayer was not remotely melodious, but simply consisted of the words in the call spoken in a loud voice.

In Indonesia, reciting the Qur'an in a melodious intonation became an issue—and the subject of heated debate—after reciter Muhammad Yasser Arafat read *Sura An-Najm* verses 1-15 during the commemoration of Isra Miraj at the State Palace in May. Instead of the conventional style of recitation, especially at the Presidential Palace, the Sunan Kalijaga Islamic State University lecturer used a Javanese style, reminding people of the traditional Javanese six-line verse form.

Although the debate died down when Ramadan began, the argument smoldered on and spread. Members of the Nahdlatul Ulama are the official supporters of the Java-style recitation—which subsequently became known as Indonesian-style recitation. *Jamiyyatul Qurra wal Huffadz*, of the Nahdlatul Ulama recitation and commitment of the Qur'an to memory section, even ruled that Indonesian-style recitation was permissible as long as it did not break the rules of correct pronunciation of the Qur'an. The debate over the Indonesian-style recitation is seen to be a prelude to the 33rd Nahdlatul Ulama Conference at the start of next month with the theme 'Upholding Indonesian Islam for Indonesia and Global Civilization'.

The proposal by Religious Affairs Minister Hakim Saifuddin to invite reciter Muhammad Yasser Arafat on to the stage at the Isra Miraj commemoration at the State Palace should be cause for celebration. Lukman made it clear from the outset that he is not an ordinary religious affairs minister who is happy to sit quietly doing nothing beyond carrying out the usual duties of working out the



costs of the *Haj* pilgrimage and payments for marriages and divorces. The son of Saifuddin Zuhri, religious affairs minister in the Sukarno era, is not the calm figure he appears to be. But neither is he a man to make a fuss. After the recitation debated heated up, he decided to say little.

The 'Indonesian-style recitation' is nothing new. Before the Arabic way of reciting came to this nation in the 1950s, followed by the Egyptian style 10 years later, there were local variants throughout the country. There was no arbiter to decide between local, Arabic or Egyptian styles. It was only during the Suharto regime that local variants were replaced and began to disappear.

Suharto, with his habit of leaving no stone unturned, then 'standardized' the recitation based on the *Saba'ah* style through the first Koranic Recitation Contest held in Makassar during Ramadan in 1968. This covered the *bayati*, *shoba*, *hijaz*, *nahawand*, *rost*, *jiharkah* and *sikah* styles of reciting. Later, every contest was monotonous and became simply another way of using up state funds to the extent that there were signs of corruption. This 'competition recitation style' became official in such a way that it could not be contaminated by any local variants.

It is difficult to imagine how at that time, for example, a 'traditional' celebration like the one held two months ago in Kabila District, Bone Bulango Regency, Sulawesi, could have taken place. It was called the *Saadela Lo Ngadi Wunu-wunungo*, or recitation of the Qur'an with local characteristics. That contest was not based on the *Sab'ah* style, but on four local styles known as *amudi*, *banjara*, *masiri* and *arabi*. These names tell us that the styles were not entirely 'local'.

The objections to a non-Arabic or non-*Misri* style are based on the opinion that it would be easy for these recitation styles to diverge from the rules concerning matters such as pronunciation or articulation. These concerns deserve consideration, but there is no guarantee that 'conventional' recitations will not have the same problems. It is all down to the reciters and the institutions that trained them in the art of reciting and committing the Qur'an to memory.

The Indonesian-style should include all local variants that have their own history in this nation. With open hearts and minds, differences in the way the Qur'an is recited should enrich this nation's culture, not restrict—let alone destroy—it. ● FULL STORY PAGE 14





COVER STORY

JAVANESE-INSPIRED RECITATION

The controversy erupted when Yasser Arafat, a lecturer at the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN) in Yogyakarta, recited verses 21-24 of Chapter 59 and verses 31-40 of Chapter 78 of the Qur'an in the Javanese *sekar macapat* incantation, during the *Isra Mi'raj* commemoration at the State Palace last May. Suddenly, residents of urban centers, who are familiar with the conflict between Middle Eastern influence and Islamic practices, quickly took this conflict to a larger political sphere. To ensure that the issue is not pegged to one political identity, this magazine attempts to explore the controversy over the Qur'an recitation with a Javanese intonation, from both the Islamic and cultural perspectives.



Kiai Subhan Ma'mun delivering sermon at Assalafiyah Islamic Boarding School, Brebes, Central Java.

—TEMPO/DINDA LEO LISTY

DURING the fasting month, conflicts and controversies are put aside. But one dispute, which reflects the two expressions of Islam—one oriented to the Middle East and the other identifying itself with the Indonesian Archipelago (Nusantara)—did not stop. The performance of Muhammad Yasser Arafat, a lecturer at the Sunan Kalijaga Islamic State University, who recited the first 15 verses of Chapter 23 of the Qur'an in the style of a Javanese song during a commemoration of the the *Isra Mir'aj* (the Prophet's Night Journey) at the State Palace on May 15, has led to a public debate full of political nuance.

The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization, through the central board of its professional organization for Qur'an reciters and memorizers, the Jamiyyatul Qur'awal Hufadz, felt that this was permitted according to Islam, as long as it did not violate the rules for the proper recital of the Qur'an. When the four-day 33rd NU Conference in Jombang, East Java, was opened on August 1, it went with the theme of Islam in the Archipelago: 'Edifying Indonesian Islam for Indonesians and World Civilization'.

"Most importantly, Indonesian (also known as Nusantara) Islam will not teach a person to become a radical, it will not teach enmity or hatred," declared NU Executive Council Chairman KH Said Aqil Siroj, during a discussion at the UN Headquarters in New York.



THE recitation of verses from short chapters of the Qur'an by *Kiai* Subhan Ma'mun had enchanted 28-year old Ali Mubarak. Sitting cross-legged in the guest room at the Assalafiyah Islamic Boarding School in Luwungragi village, Central Java, located about two kilometers to the south of the Klampok stretch of the North Coast Road (Pantura), Ali was entranced. He never blinked, his mouth was agape and the back of his head bent backwards in joy. He lost track of time, until the call to the evening prayer sounded. *Kiai* Subhan stopped his recital.

"I am always amazed whenever I hear Kang Kaji recite the Qur'an," said Ali, a fa-



ther of one, in an interview carried out in early July.

Kang Kaji is the nickname of *Kiai* Subhan, 59, who runs the boarding school founded by Ma'mun, his father, in 1940. The *kiai* (Islamic scholar) is tall and large, has short gray hair covered by a white fez-like cap. He recites the Qur'an with an unusual intonation, and that is by using *langgam Jawa* or Javanese musical scale, which stays within a limited tonal range. *Kiai* Subhan never uses shrill high notes during his recitations.

Despite the limited range of notes, the effect is immersive. "The Javanese culture is generally soft. Verses of the Qur'an which are recited in the style of a Javanese melody are more solemn and make an impression on the hearts of the listeners," said Subhan after breaking his fast with a small cup of sweet tea and a large date.

Subhan learned how to recite the Qur'an over Javanese melodies when he was a student of *Kiai* Sanusi, a famous *kiai* from Ciwaringin District in West Java. "I studied under *Kiai* Sanusi, starting from 1974," he said.

When teaching the students, as Subhan recalled, *Kiai* Sanusi would often recite with a Javanese melody. Unfortunate-

▲
Jadul Maulana

Muhammad Yasser Arafat

ly, before he could master the technique, his teacher died. "I can only imitate his style," said Subhan.

According to Subhan, reciting the Qur'an with a Javanese melody is more difficult compared to the *qiraat sab'ah* (the seven generally accepted recitation styles of *bayati*, *shoba*, *hijaz*, *nahawand*, *rost*, *jiharkah* and *sikah*). Besides having to familiarize himself with many Javanese songs, the recitation of the Qur'an in this manner may not violate any of the rules of *tajweed* (the rules governing pronunciation during a recitation of the Qur'an) or letter vocalization points. "Not all verses can read over Javanese melodies," he said.

Those reciting over the Javanese musical scale must also have memorized the rules of *tajweed*. In this way, the reciter can find those verses whose recitation can match with the chosen song melody. If their knowledge of *tajweed* is weak, said





of Gadjah Mada University. Perhaps this why the first time someone hears it, the macapat appears boring.

According to Yasser, in the past the *sekar macapat* was mainly used to recite the Qur'an and for extolling Prophet Muhammad. Its melodies and meter were used when reading poetry containing life advice and hymns about inner and outer knowledge. In Javanese society, the latter two are commonly known as *suluk* and *wirid*.

The *sekar macapat* has 11 (song) meters. These are: *mijil*, *maskumambang*, *kinanthi*, *sinom*, *asmaradhana*, *durma*, *dhandanggula*, *pangkur*, *megatruh*, *gambuh*, and finally *pocung*. It is similar to the *maqam* or musical scale of Arabic-style recitation. Each of the meters was created by some of the Wali Songo saints and their students. Each represents the spiritual journey of man, from birth to death.

Mijil, for instance, said Yasser, means birth. This meter was arranged by Sunan Geseng or Prince Cakrajaya. *Pocung* means leaf tip. This final meter symbolizes the *mayit* (cadaver) which has been buried in the ground. "*Pocung* was made by Sunan Giri Prapen," said this man born in Langkat, North Sumatra, on September 30, 1983.

In Javanese-style recitation, Yasser uses the *pangkur* meter. This is the eighth meter, which literally means *mungkuri* (turn one's back to). In short, *pangkur* is a meter which describes someone who has left behind the worldly life. "The Javanese also refer to *pangkur* as *pangudi ilmu Qur'an*," he said.

Even so, the meter of the *pangkur* is not always precisely followed. This is because he still gives precedence to the rules of tajweed in the recitation of the Qur'an. "Those who understand Javanese songs will say that the *pangkur* is out of order," said this graduate of the Darul Rahman Islamic Boarding School in Jakarta, run by KH Syukron Makmun.

Yasser said that he is not the only or the first to bring back the popularity of *langgam Jawa* in the recitation of the Qur'an. Since 2011, some of his associates have been using it at Jenderal Sudirman Mosque and other mosques in the vicinity. It is used when leading the prayer or reciting the Qur'an at certain events.

This is why Muhammad Jadul Maula,

Subhan, the verse could be read improperly when it sticks to the melody at certain points.

This high level of difficulty was the reason Subhan decided to stop teach Qur'an recitation in the style of Javanese songs to his thousands of students. However, he often uses this style during group recitation. "I feel that there are not any fixed standards or styles of recitation of the Qur'an in the style of *langgam Jawa*. It depends on each region," said Subhan.

Yasser calls this recitation style *tilawah Jawi*. Basically this is in the style of *mu-jawwad*—correctly reciting the Qur'an in a melodious manner according to classical Arabic publications. The melody used tends to be even slower compared to the slow *murattal* style. He does not just apply *langgam* style in his recitations. He uses also the *sekar macapat* rules of Javanese poetic construction, and the song meter of *pangkur laras pelog*. "To ensure

it does not imitate a shadow puppet play," he said, when he was asked about the custodian's office at the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque in Yogyakarta.

The *sekar macapat*, said Yasser, is a melodious spiritual arrangement created by the old Muslim saints (*wali*) of Java. Literally, the word *macapat* comes from 'eye', '*suca*' (vision), and '*makrifat*' or imperceptible. So it signifies being able to see the unseen. This is why the *macapat* are also called *sekar* (flower/bloom). The true flower is *ma'rifatullah* or knowing God. It is not singing because it is out for contemplation.

"The *macapat* are for meditation," said Yasser. Therefore it is not right to equate *macapat* with the musical scales of *dangdut* or *keroncong* music, or hip hop or rock. "There is no *macapat* to get worked up," said Subhan, currently pursuing a Masters degree program in anthropology at the Cultural Studies Department

who runs the Kali Opak Islamic Boarding School, said he was surprised to hear the flood of criticism when Yasser recited the Qur'an with langgam Jawa. Jadul was the one who recommended Yasser when an official from the Ministry of Religious Affairs was looking for a Qur'an reciter who could recite the Qur'an with langgam Jawa in the Isra Mir'aj event. Minister of Religious Affairs Lukman Hakim Syaifudin was attracted to this style because he once heard it when attending an event commemorating the death of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur).

It is indeed rare to hear the Qur'an being recited over a Javanese melody, but was once a custom among Javanese Muslims. Jadul said he often heard some lecturers from Sunan Kalijaga UIN reciting the Qur'an with langgam Jawa when they led the prayers in the 1980s. "This kind of recitation was once common in rural areas and at boarding schools, but has long been forgotten," said the Vice Chairman of the Tanfidhiyah of Regional Administrators of the Nadhlatul Ulama in Yogyakarta.

The controversy over the recitation of the Qur'an with langgam Jawa has actually made Jadul happy. Many Muslims have felt motivated to revive this nearly-forgotten Javanese Muslim tradition. He said that it is very uncommon for boarding schools to officially teach Javanese musical scales during Qur'an recitation lessons. "Hopefully after this many boarding schools will bring it back," said Jadul.

At the Kali Opak boarding school, there is no instruction in reciting the Qur'an with langgam Jawa. At that school, Jadul said he focuses more on providing room to go deeper into Islamic heritage in the arts. As he understands it, the Krapyak boarding school intends to teach recitation of the Qur'an with langgam Jawa.

Jadul feels that some are criticizing this recitation style because they believe only

Arabic melodic intonation may be used in the recitation of the Qur'an. However, the saying of the Prophet used as justification by those critics is classified as being weak by scholars. When it comes to musical scales, the recitation of the Qur'an can vary by culture.

As it turns out, there are more defenders than critics of the langgam Jawa style. This meant, Jadul added, that awareness to take another look at Islamic traditions is becoming more popular. So far, he has observed signs of Arabization being too strong in the Indonesian Muslim community, and consequently overlooking the historical inheritance of Indonesian Islam.

Using langgam Jawa as a base melody in the recitation of the Qur'an, according to Jadul, could strengthen the process of seeking the unique identity of Indonesian Muslims. Jadul said that the Javanese melodies accentuates an esthetic which evokes spirituality, because its intonation can touch the listener's heart. This is closer to the traditions of Islam in Java, which has a strong nuance of *tasawuf* or Islamic spirituality. The musicality of Arabia, according to Jadul, puts more emphasis on surface esthetics.

The strengthening of Arabic cultural elements in the Indonesian Muslim community has led to a cultural dichotomy, such as the culture of *santri* (pious Muslims) and *abangan* (common Muslims) in Javanese society. Jadul dislikes such a dichotomy, because it blurs Muslim identity in Indonesia. "That was due to the politics of the 1950s, when non-Muslim parties often used traditional arts during campaigns, and many kiai responded by encouraging Arab-style arts," he said.

Unfortunately, he added, the effects of the political events of the 1950s—which continued during the 1960s—became even more solidified during Suharto's New Order period. He cited the policy of



the Religious Affairs Ministry on the guidance of Islamic arts, which only focuses on the performance arts of *hadrah*, *qasidah*, and so on. As a result, Islam in Indonesia has increasingly been equated with Arabic culture.

According to Yasser, in Indonesia, Arabic-style recitation of the Qur'an first came to Indonesia through those who came back from the *haj* pilgrimage during the 1950s. In fact, the *mishri* (Egyptian) recitation style—now used at the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an recitation event—only arrived in the 1960s, after the Egyptian government sent many reciters to Indonesia to recite the Qur'an during the fasting month of Ramadan.

Those recitation styles were not as popular and structured as they are today. Up until 1977, the Qur'an Recitation Development Institution authorized seven recita-

IT IS INDEED RARE TO HEAR THE QUR'AN BEING RECITED OVER A JAVANESE MELODY, BUT WAS ONCE A CUSTOM AMONG JAVANESE MUSLIMS. JADUL SAID HE OFTEN HEARD SOME LECTURERS FROM SUNAN KALIJAGA UIN RECITING THE QUR'AN WITH LANGGAM JAWA WHEN THEY LED THE PRAYERS IN THE 1980S. "THIS KIND OF RECITATION WAS ONCE COMMON IN RURAL AREAS AND AT BOARDING SCHOOLS, BUT HAS LONG BEEN FORGOTTEN."



ation of letters becomes imprecise, which has the potential to alter the text and the meaning,” he said.

Another point is following recitation etiquette, such as having the intention to recite purely as a worship, and acting solemnly. Those using melodies should not be excessive or use an overly-affected style. The melodies used should not come from a song or scale which is associated with immoral behavior, or which can distance a person from remembering God. The recitation may not be accompanied by music, which would disturb the concentration of the reciter and listeners.

He said, even though it is allowable, recitation of the Qur’an intoned in the style of Indonesian melodies still needs time before it can be accepted by all circles, whether at the local or international levels. He said that there are two challenges in developing these Indonesian recitation styles. First, time is needed to popularize Indonesian melodies, until they are universal and familiar to all listeners. Second, the Indonesian recitation styles must be able to express the messages of the Qur’an, whereby the meaning and the melody can work together, as they do with the seven established recitation styles.

He said it is not easy to bring together the melody, tajweed, and textual meaning. Another difficulty is making it acceptable to all, not just a certain ethnic group. “In the end, time will tell whether or not this langgam Jawa will continue and grow, or will be lost over time,” he said.

Ahsin Sakho Muhammad, rector of the Institute of Qur’anic Science (IIQ) from 2005 to 2014, said that basically Islamic law allows the Qur’an to be recited melodiously, as long as no one has ruled that it is religiously disliked or disallowed. However, not all national songs can be used for this purpose.

According to this President of the NU’s Majelis Ilmi Jamiyyatul Qura Wal Huffazh, it is up to the reciters to properly match the verses recited with the melodies. “For famous reciters such as Syekh Mustafa Ismail, Syekh Muhammad Rif’at, and Syekh Hilbawi, the match between the meaning of the verses and the choice of melody will make the difference,” he said.

● ERWINZACHRI, ADDI MAWAHIBUNIDHOM, ANANGZA KARIA (YOGYAKARTA), DINDA LEO LISTY (BREBES), EDWIN FAJERIAL (MADURA)

tion styles (*maqam*) of the Qur’an.

“So how was it recited before the 1950s?” he asked. During that time, he continued, the people of the Indonesian archipelago recited the Qur’an in the style of ‘local’ songs. This included the macapat melody in Javanese society. “This *tilawah Jawi* was finally displaced by the Arabic style, which grew in popularity.”



INTERNATIONAL Qur’an reciter Maria Ulfah said that using various melodies puts a demand on creativity, and often depends on the mood of the reciter. Javanese melodies can be used as long as they can follow the rules of tajweed. In this case, existing Javanese songs can be added to the seven main recitation styles to provide variety. “With the Qur’an, the songs must follow tajweed. In reading poetry, the poems must follow the songs,” she said.

Because the Qur’an is recited slowly, according to Maria, the langgam Jawa must be chosen accordingly. “*Dhandanggula* might match, because it is slow. A fast song like *kinanti* is not suitable,” said Maria, who has mastered several types of langgam Jawa. Maria felt that reciting the Qur’an using Javanese melodies which re-



Reciting the Qur’an in *langgam Jawa* at Kali Opak Islamic Boarding School, Bantul, Yogyakarta.

quire a nasal quality (*ghunnah*) can create problems.

“In Arabic pronunciation, there may not be any nasal sounds except for *ghunnah*,” said this Vice President of the NU’s Majelis Ilmi Jamiyyatul Qura Wal Huffazh—a professional organization for *qurra* (reciters) and *huffazh* (memorizers) of the Qur’an.

Muchlis M. Hanafi, head of the Qur’an Verification Commission at the Religious Affairs Ministry, notices that the argument of those who allow langgam Jawa is stronger than those who are against it. This is why he tends to allow it, on several conditions. Following the rules of tajweed is one such condition. This includes the length of vowel sounds, the *makharijul* or enunciation points of letters, *waqaf* (points to stop reciting), and *ibtida* (begin reciting).

“Let’s not get carried away or influenced by the melody to the point that the lengths of the vowel sounds or the enun-

INNER MELODY

Four Gorontalo styles of Qur'an recitation are alive and well. A recitation event in the local styles is even being held at the province level.

THE fasting month of Ramadan was still a month away, but the festive mood in the town square of Bone Bulango Regency in Gorontalo, felt like the Eid-ul-Fitr holiday had come early. A large crowd, with each person dressed in their best clothes, descended on the town's center. The vice-governor, mayor, district chiefs and other bureaucrats cleared their schedules in order to attend this major event in Gorontalo Province. Most interesting of all was the parade of uniformed women in headscarves representing the 74 districts of Gorontalo. Children, grandchildren, and neighbors came out to support the competing districts.

This is the province-level *SaadelaLoNgadi Wunu-wunungo*—abbreviated SNW—which was held last May. SNW is a Qur'an Recital Event (MTQ) with a local flair. A week before a controversy erupted over the recitation of some verses of the Qur'an in the style of a Javanese melody during the *Isra Mi'raj* Commemoration at the State Palace in Jakarta, the Gorontalo Province held this special event without much fanfare. The melody and recitation style were done in a unique Gorontalo style. While the MTQ only allowed recitation of the Qur'an to be done in the seven standard styles (*bayati, shoba, hijaz, nahawan, rost, jiharkah, and sikah*), the SNW had introduced four local styles: *amudi, banjara, masiri, and arabi*. This is according to Lukman D. Katili, an official of the LPTQ (Qur'an Recitation Development Institution) of Gorontalo, told *Tempo* two weeks ago.

Seated cross-legged on a 10x6 meter stage, nine people formed a semi-circle. From the center of the semi-circle, a *qariah* (Qur'an reciter) says a prayer using the *masiri* melody. He calls out *Taqabbalallahu wa minkum*, which is respond-

ed to by the others with *minna wa minkum ya karim* (accept from us all, oh Most Generous). The reciter leads a dialogue with those in the semi-circle.

In this dialogue, he is like a soloist facing a complete orchestra, like playing a few lines of a melody, and the others respond to his musical introduction. After a few verses, his associates respond with *al hamdulillahi zil jalaal, or assalamu alaikum nasykuru nashrakum, or ya muhaiminu ya salaam, salimnaa wal muslimin, or ya arhamarrahimin, or other words.*

On top of that, he has been voicing the lines in a local melody, while promising not to change the musical scale during the recitation of the Qur'an. He has clearly decided to use one of those four local melodic recitation styles from Gorontalo. However, the participants know better than to choose the *amudi* melody, which is too demanding. It requires using a very high vocal range in one breath.

Generally, its mature participants have no difficulty in sticking to the rules for the proper recitation (*tajweed*) and pronunciation of the Qur'an in its original Arabic. In Gorontalo society, which has more of an oral than a written culture, as well as a fondness for singing, a special mechanism has developed to correct any errors of recitation. This mechanism has been preserved well through *wunungo* study groups.

Such is the, "Tradition of reciting the Qur'an which does not violate (the rules of) *tajweed* or pronunciation," said Sabara K. Ngou, head of the Regional Office of the Religious Affairs Ministry in Gorontalo. In other words, although the melody may be very important, music may not take precedence over the meaning and proper recitation of the Qur'an.

On Friday morning two weeks ago, the *wunungo* study group at At-Taubah Mosque in South Dulomo, North was opened with *taqabalallahu minkum*, to



▲
Rasin Dama

Gorontalo Vice Governor Idris Rahim (right) opening the Gorontalo MTQ in early May.

which came the reply *minna wa minkum ya karim*. This religious study session done in the *masiri* traditional recitation style moves slowly, because the reciters must repeatedly stop in order to give the others a chance to recite the *al hamdulillahi zil jalaal wunungo*, send peace to the Prophet, or recite invocations.

In this slow and musical mechanism, guiding *ustaz* (religious teacher) Lukman D. Katili and *ustaz* Rasin Dama, general manager of the Gorontalo LPTQ, are fully authorized to proceed with or interrupt the study sessions. They repeatedly correct any errors of *tajweed*, pronunciation, or melody of their students. In this way, the purity of the endeavor is maintained.

Many methods are used in Gorontalo to correct improper recitation. In villages, according to Lukman and Rasin, teachers have a proven method for reducing the number of recitation errors made by students. The *ustaz* in this remote area always stand in front of the students with a plate and spoon in hand. Each time a student makes a mistake, the spoon clangs



on the plate, and the teacher corrects the reading.

Whether it is recognized or not, the SNW at the province level, which is heavily attended by older women, is a larger part of this correction mechanism. Rasin Dema, who is also a judge at the SNW, can quickly detect when the majority of the participants have difficulty regulating their breathing. Short breaths will force the reciter to stop reading at the wrong places.

"Because they are unable to keep reciting, they end up stopping in the middle of a subject or predicate. They should only stop after completing a sentence," said Rasin. To avoid this problem, each participant must understand the meaning of each word recited.

This *wunungo* tradition has an extensive repertoire of poems and songs for correcting recitation mistakes, praising good recital, and even for reminding students who have trouble accepting the teacher's corrections. For this, there is a special *wunungo* in Malay which is recit-

ed with a very simple melody: 'Don't get angry reading the Qur'an'. There is another *wunungo* in the Gorontalo language to make improvements: *po opio hengadimu/ po opio hengadimu/ po opi yo hengadimu/ nadi-nadi di toti limu*. This means 'Improve your recitation because the prophets are next to you'.

There is something different in those sayings. "The Islam which came to Gorontalo was Sufi in nature," said Lukman. It was not rooted in *fiqhi* or oriented to seeking what is right and wrong, but more on upholding good moral behavior in society. The *wunungo* itself, according to Lukman, is the product of the acculturation of pre-Islamic musical culture, outside culture (*masiri, arabi, banjara* indicate elements of Egypt, Arabia and Banjar), and Islamic culture from Ternate and Limboto in the 17th Century. "Since then the people of Gorontalo have only known those four traditional recitation styles," said Lukman.

Like the Islamic development done by Wali Songo in Java, shepherd's tunes, in-

cantations for rain, and other mantras were Islamized by propagators of Islam in Gorontalo. Local melodies were often used to praise God and extol Prophet Muhammad. "This is what differs it from national songs (the seven standard recitations)," said Lukman, who is also secretary of the JQH (Jamiyatul Qurro wal Huffazh), an NU association for reciters and memorizers of the Qur'an.

Maria Ulfah, a national reciter who won an international MTQ in Kuala Lumpur in 1980, has an interesting explanation about local recitation styles. "The use of melodies puts a demand on creativity, and variations often depends on the mood of the reciter," she said. In Gorontalo, local melodies accompany one's life journey, from birth to adulthood. This makes them grow as individuals. Local recitation styles are more than just edification of local identity, but are a phenomenon which show that Islam is universal. It thrives and lives in all conditions and locations, whether locally or globally.

● IDRUS F. SHAHAB

LUKMAN HAKIM SAIFUDDIN, RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS MINISTER:

THIS IS NOT A DE-ARABIZATION PROCESS

AFTER his preoccupation with the controversy over the Javanese-intonation reading of the Qur'an, Religious Affairs Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin now must focus his attention on the Nusantara Islam issue. This involves the debate of a genre of Islam that is unique to Indonesia, one that is being unofficially supported by the government.

The rejection by hard-line Islamists has not dampened the government's plan to keep pushing for a Nusantara (archipelagic) Islam. "They got it wrong. Nusantara Islam is not an ideology," said Lukman, in a special interview with *Tempo* reporters Sugiharto and Sunudyantoro, last week.

You promote Qur'an reading in the Nusantara intonation. How do you explain this to your detractors?

Nusantara Islam is not Javanese Islam. It is in no way the Javanization of Islam, and neither is it a de-Arabization process. Essentially it's about preserving tradition. The Nusantara intonation is very common in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school—Ed.) found in Java's rural areas. I am aware that among the Muslim community, there are those who are for it and those oppose it. Again, this is about approach. If some disapprove of it, no problem.

Will there be some kind of consensus over the Nusantara-intonation Qur'an reading?

We will leave it to the public. Always to the public, whether they want to turn this into a content or not. It's up to the people.

Regarding Nusantara Islam, how are you managing the hard rejection by some groups?

They are wrong because they understand Nusantara Islam as an ideology.

It's one approach (to religion). For example, how to look at the status of women. In a number of Middle Eastern countries, women have no freedom. They are not allowed to drive a car on their own, they cannot go out by themselves, they are even disallowed from going to places of worship. In Indonesia, women do all of those things. The understanding of religious values is linked to the reality of an Indonesian context. Admittedly, there are others using different approaches. They go against tradition. They discard or destroy tradition.

Indonesian Islam is more accommodating towards culture and tradition.

Islamic values have gone through acculturation, insofar as tradition, in principle does not deviate from the core religious values. For Indonesians, this works best. For example, how does religion relate to the state. In a number of countries, relations are formalized, and that's how Islamic states are formed. In Islamic countries, in order to ground Islamic values, the state must officially be involved. This is what happens in Middle Eastern countries. But there are countries which totally separate religion from the state. They are called secular states. Religious issues depends on the individual. Indonesia is not an Islamic state, although the majority people are Muslims. Conversely, Indonesia is not a totally secular country. In our Pancasila and the constitution, re-

ligion plays a very important role.

How do you deal with groups opposing the concept of Nusantara Islam?

There must be a dialog. Supporters of Nusantara Islam as well as those who oppose it must be wise about this. Supporters of Nusantara Islam must be modest and open in explaining it to their opponents. Nusantara Islam does not negate the Arabic influence.

How can Nusantara Islam reach those whose ideology embraces violence?

The urgency and relevance of Nusantara Islam is to seek a momentum in the midst of a growing tendency to easily attack other (religious) groups. The world is probably thinking, maybe the Indonesian Islam model is the right one for all Muslims.

So Nusantara Islam is like an option to those who tend to regard other religions as *kafir* or godless?

Yes, this is optional, like a model to apply Islamic values that can be emulated by others. Islamic values was grounded in peace. Basically, peace and harmony is the ideal of us all.

How do you prevent radicalism from emerging among the faithful?

There are two roots to extremist religion. First, it is a response towards injustice. When someone or a group continues to be treated unjustly in many aspects, it cannot fight back in the right way. They take a short cut using violence in the name of religion. That's the instant way of fighting injustice. Secondly, there are people who believe it is right to justify religion through violence. On the first issue, that's not the Religious Affairs Ministry alone to manage. It's the responsibility of all of us, including the United Nations. Powerful countries must also be involved.

Does the Religious Affairs Ministry handle those who justify violence?

Yes, we manage them because we

THE URGENCY AND RELEVANCE OF NUSANTARA ISLAM IS TO SEEK A MOMENTUM IN THE MIDST OF A GROWING TENDENCY TO EASILY ATTACK OTHER (RELIGIOUS) GROUPS. THE WORLD IS PROBABLY THINKING, MAYBE THE INDONESIAN ISLAM MODEL IS THE RIGHT ONE FOR ALL MUSLIMS.





would like to correct their erroneous understanding of what religion means. That's what we are doing, deradicalizing them. Yet I find that word problematic. Religious people must have roots. Radicalism is not a problem, it becomes a problem when it's turned into a doctrine that tolerates violence. We've carried out studies and research, involving religious mass organizations so that radicalism in religion does not lead to justifying violence.

Why do we need to set up an Islamic campus to teach moderation?

The President has stressed on the im-

portance of a model and peaceful Islam. We don't know 10-20 years ahead of us whether Indonesian Islam will persevere. Hopefully, it won't end up like Syria or other countries which are currently in turmoil. Who can guarantee anything? That's why civilized (religion) must be well-managed. To protect and nurture it for the future, we felt it necessary to have a learning institute. Indonesia has no institution that adequately represents an Indonesia model of Islamic studies.

Aren't the Islamic universities established around Indonesia enough?

We want to complement them. There's



Religious Affairs Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin (left) during the *Isra Mi'raj* Commemoration at the State Palace, Jakarta, in May.

no need for campuses with huge buildings. We want study centers that will study Islamic issues holistically. For instance, the study of Nusantara Islam. We don't want to upset the existing state Islamic universities. These institutions are mostly teaching strata 2 and strata 3 education. Meanwhile, Egypt has its Al-Azhar University, why can't Indonesia have a similarly representative campus? I and my colleagues, among them Komaruddin Hidayat, Din Syamsuddin and Said Aqil Siradj, have studied the idea of such a campus. We have thought about it for some time, not just recently. I have conveyed this to the President and the Vice-President, who welcomed the idea. So, this is in the interest of Indonesian Muslims. ●

RELIGIOUS PEOPLE MUST HAVE ROOTS. RADICALISM IS NOT A PROBLEM, IT BECOMES A PROBLEM WHEN IT'S TURNED INTO A DOCTRINE THAT TOLERATES VIOLENCE. WE'VE CARRIED OUT STUDIES AND RESEARCH, INVOLVING RELIGIOUS MASS ORGANIZATIONS SO THAT RADICALISM IN RELIGION DOES NOT LEAD TO JUSTIFYING VIOLENCE.

BELIEF AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization has been promoting Indonesian Islam, through discussion fora and social media to spread the word.

MOHAMAD Syafi' Ali has been very busy since mid-June. In addition to his routine duties presiding over NU's online media and being on the organizing committee for the 33rd NU Conference, this slender long-haired man is on the front lines, promoting the concept of Archipelagic Islam (Islam Nusantara) or Indonesian Islam in the media.

Since he first came out with the concept and attacked from both sides, Syafi' had to prepare some counterarguments for his critics. "Why is Islam which appreciates Indonesian traditions suddenly being questioned?" he said, last week.

Syafi' is trying to shape public opinion with the help of his fellow NU followers or *nahdliyin*, both in the media and through social media networks. Various discussion fora have also been held. Sometimes those with different points of view engage in me-me battles. As the time of the Conference draws near, which is to be held from August 1-5 in Jombang, East Java, the Islam Nusantara campaign is being intensified.

This effort began on June 14, with a speech by Indonesian President Joko Widodo at the grand *istigasah* event and the opening of the National Consultation of NU Scholars at Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta. At that time, speaking to an audience of 4,000, the President said that he was grateful because Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population in the world, was not beset by schisms, such as those

which occurred in some Middle Eastern countries. "Praised by God, our Islam is Indonesian Islam," he said.

Jokowi then continued that 'Islam Nusantara' is marked by tolerance and good manners. The President's speech was close to the theme being used at the NU Conference, namely edifying Indonesian Islam for Indonesian and world civilization. Officials from NU and the government were present, including Religious Affairs Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin.

Before Jokowi took the podium, NU General Chairman KH Said Aqil Siradj delivered a stern speech. Targeting intolerant Muslim groups, he called on the *nahdliyin*, which he claimed to be about 80,000 people, to oppose violence and terrorism committed in the name of Islam. "Keeping watch over this Islam Nusantara is the duty of the Nahdlatul Ulama," said Said Aqil.

This 'launching' of the Islam Nusantara concept immediately triggered pro and contra responses, especially in discussions and debates in the social media. Those against the idea say that it consists of misguided teachings, which combine religion with mystical culture. "Islam was not revealed to preserve culture," said Irfan S. Awwas, Chairman of the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), last week.

Irfan explained that this Islam Nusantara concept comes from the thinking of mystical figure Joyodiningrat, which was first developed in the 1940s. Because following of Joyodiningrat's thinking is branded as a communist product, he con-

cluded that Islam Nusantara is an effort to stir up a similar movement in Indonesia. Irfan challenged the figures promoting Islam Nusantara to an open debate. "They have to be willing to meet us in an open debate," said the leader of that Wahhabi-oriented Islamic organization.

Fahmi Salim Zubair, a member of the Religious Studies and Research Commission of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) said that there was a diversity of Islamic concepts. However, he reminded the group of Islam Nusantara supporters not to come into conflict with existing Islamic concepts. "So as not to give the impression of a golden child and a step-child," he said in a discussion about Islam Nusantara at the residence of Religious Affairs Minister, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, in Jakarta last week. He added that violence in the Arab world had not occurred because of Islam, but because of political conflict.

However, the friction between the cultural tradition and orthodox religious camps began a month before President Jokowi's speech at Istiqlal Mosque. In an event commemorating the *Isra Mi'raj* (Prophet's Night Journey), held at the State Palace on May 15, Muhammad Yasser Arafat, a lecturer at the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Yogyakarta, recited 15 verses of the Qur'an in the style of a Javanese melody.

Those who disagreed hold that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, and should be read as it was at the time of its divine revelation. However, Minister Luk-





▲ Nahdlatul Ulama's grand *istigasah* event at Istiqlal Mosque, Jakarta, last June.

Mohamad Syafi' Ali alias Savic (left).

man feels that, "Regional melodic scales are a part of the concept of Islam Nusantara, so let the public discuss it."

These competing arguments have led those against the concept to coin a new term to refer to those who approve of the practices of Islam Nusantara, namely the Jemaat Islam Nusantara (JIN). "That is a label which carries a negative meaning," said Syafi' (as it refers to the jinn).

This pressure has only raised the enthusiasm of those who are pro-tolerance to promote the concept of Nusantara Islam. Syafi's team is writing articles in the media and for Friday prayer sermons which support Nusantara Islam. "Maybe if no one had made a fuss, we would have gone about it normally."

Activist Ulil Abshar Abdalla said that

those who object to Nusantara Islam know that they will become the target of NU as the conference nears. He claimed it was mainly Wahhabi groups who felt bothered. The birth of NU was triggered by the strengthening of the Wahhabi group in Saudi Arabia.

The influence of the Wahhabis has strengthened in Indonesia, in line with the emergence of an anti-Shia campaign. The NU also feels that the Shia view is not correct, but it has never conducted a massive movement to destroy the Shia community. "Islam Nusantara does not want social conflict," said this leader of the Liberal Islam Network (JIL).

Increased promotional activity for Nusantara Islam was also triggered by the radical Islamist movement which has begun to grow at home and abroad, namely the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). "The end goal of Nusantara Islam is to weaken radical and terrorist views," said Imam Aziz, chairman of the NU Conference Organizing Committee.

Dhyah Madya Ruth S.N., an activist from the Lazuardi Birru Foundation,

which focuses on tolerance, mentioned a worrying development about the increased potential for radicalism. Of the 800-900 people convicted in terrorism cases, 200-300 will be released this year.

She is not convinced that the deradicalization program being carried out by law enforcement authorities is capable of eliminating intolerance. This is especially true because intolerance is triggered by faith and ideology, which are hard to change. "It might be possible to introduce other ideas, including offering other life choices," she said.

The National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) is cooperating with religious figures to erode the radical mindset in the public and among former terrorists. According to former BNPT Chairman Ansyaad Mbai, various approaches are being taken, even for terrorist perpetrators who are still in prison. "But God knows how effective it will be," he said. "Radicalism is in the mind, and who can know what is in people's minds."

● JOBPIE SUGIHARTO, PRIHANDOKO (JAKARTA), ANANG ZAKARIA (YOGYAKARTA)

NUSANTARA ISLAM IN THE MIDDLE OF RADICALIZATION

THE Jokowi administration hopes Nusantara Islam (IN) will be the key to success in the state's de-radicalization efforts, which have often been labelled as a series of failures. De-radicalization efforts thus far have been considered ineffectual for two reasons. First, efforts were unable to eliminate the threat of terrorism since the first Bali bombing in 2002, and second, the program has not prevented hundreds of Indonesians from travelling to Syria and Iraq to fight with IS and An Nusro.

The spirit of IN is not new: how can Indonesians live as Muslims without being like the Arabs? Although the prophet Muhammad was an Arab and the Qur'an is also written in Arabic, being an Arab is not the same as being a Muslim. Hadrat Syaikh KH Hasyim Asy'ari studied and taught for years in Mecca and yet when he came back to Indonesia to establish Nahdhotul Ulama (NU), he worked to maintain the unity of Indonesia and celebrate pluralism based on Islam *rahmatan lilalamin* (bringing peace to the universe).

However, it cannot be ignored that over the last 13 years there have been several people convicted of terrorism from the NU milieu, even though they were not formally members of NU. Aman Abdurrahman is one example. He told me in a jail interview that he became involved with NU when he was a teenager. Aman is a recidivist of terrorism offences. Involvement in the first case was the Cimanggis bombing in 2004 and the second case was the Aceh military training camp in 2011. Behind bars in a 'maximum security' prison in Nusakambangan, he diligently translated IS propaganda from Arabic into Indonesian, which was then uploaded by his hard core supporters to a website called *Tauhid Wal Jihad*.

Thus, the spirit of IN should be positioned in the context of mainstreaming the moderate version of Islam in a large coalition that crosses beyond NU's boundaries. This coalition should be directed to revive the existing local wisdom and practices that do not conflict with Islamic values. The *Padungku* celebration in Poso is one of the clearest examples of this. In this yearly event, people from all walks of life regardless of their ethnicity and religion will gather together to feast after the harvest. In Ambon, we know of traditions like *pela*, *gandong*, *makanpatita* and *masohi* that serve as effective tools for reconciliation and help to further prevent the spread of radicalism.

Indonesian Muslims will then develop the confidence to adopt these local practices knowing that it will not erode their Islam because there are historical references within Islam itself. Take the example of giving *mahar* (an Arabic word meaning dowry) to a would-be bride. *Mahar* is an Arab tradition that was practiced before Islam, when parents would set the



price of the *mahar*, just like a commercial transaction. However then Islam came and transformed the concept of *mahar*: now the bride decides her *mahar* and owns it.

The above anecdote indicates that Islam is very dynamic and accommodating to local practices. NU cadres should not 'cross the fence', especially to transnational Islamic movements that often act at 'remote control' from the Middle East. At the grass roots level, NU activists have started to complain to me: "In the past, we worried that our sandals would be taken away at the mosque. Now, our mosques have been taken by them."

The good intentions of IN has been 'bullied' by some other Islamic activists because of its package: putting the word '*nusantara*' (archipelago) after the word 'Islam'. They accuse IN of forcing local values onto Islam rather than Islamizing local values, for example the Qur'anic recital in a Javanese style.

IN opponents have a tendency to embrace Wahabi teachings. Ironically, Muhammadiyah, the second largest moderate Islamic organization after NU, is categorized under this group, although Muhammadiyah has been contextualizing Islam in a different way. At a glance, one can quickly spot Wahabi influence in Muhammadiyah's efforts to purify Islamic rituals.

However Muhammadiyah has provided women with public space which is strikingly different from Wahabi teachings in Saudi Arabia. During the fight for independence, figures from Muhammadiyah like General Soedirman and Indone-



NOOR HUDA ISMAIL*



sia's first president, Sukarno, also played a prominent role.

Even among *salafi* movements that have strong Wahabi influences, they do not consider Indonesian state agencies as *thaghut* (tyrants) worth fighting against. They do not want to rebel or fight against the state as long as the state still allows the call to prayer (*adzan*) to be heard. So it is completely naïve and wrong to lump all Wahabi as supporters of terrorism and of IS. While Wahabi is not tolerant of minority groups like the Shia and Ahmadis, there are also examples of intolerance towards minority groups in areas where NU has strong bases, for example Cikesik (Banten) and Sampang (Madura).

Therefore, if the target of IN are groups that have been involved in terrorism activities, IN will not be effective if it is only exclusively NU and continues to find problems with *figh-khilaftiyah* (praying rituals). The problem in this nation is massive and one mass organization like the NU will not be able to solve it by itself. In fact, the group of individuals involved in violence like Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) or Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT) is very small and weak. Looking at the background of those who are involved in terrorism in Indonesia in the last 13 years, one can read the pattern of their movement, which is: 'You Again, You Again'.

They come from known groups. Even if we see the emergence of a new group, it is a splinter from the old group. These splinters will label their old group as *qoidun* (an Arabic word meaning those who are only sitting around), who no longer has any interest in carrying out 'solid' jihad.

Pepi Fernando, the mastermind of the book bomb, was thought to belong to a new network, but after a series of investigations, it was revealed that he used to be part of the already known group, Darul Islam (DI). In the documentary film project that I produced, *Jihad Selfie*, I discovered that social media provides a new dimension of recruitment, especially for IS. Those who join IS through social media do not come from known groups. Facebook messenger allows a new recruit to communicate with those already in IS. Two Indonesian students in Turkey, Yazid Ulwan and Bagus Wijangga Panulat, who joined IS, are examples of this new phenomenon.

Since the 1950s whenever DI was attacked by outside threats they have gotten stronger. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman in his edited book *Fault Lines in Global Jihad* (2011) explain that the most credible arguments for why Al-Qaeda and global jihadis have weakened, aside from counter terrorism measures, are internal problems within the organizations. In the context of Indonesia, the DI was split into JI, and not long after that, JI was split into MMI (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia—*Ed.*) and then JAT and to JAS (Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah—*Ed.*), and on and on. They may have adopted different names but they play with same old players and fight over memberships from the same niche market. International issues like the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, Palestine and the Rohingya will unite, can reunite, them.

To weaken them, the government must not only smartly capitalize on the groups' internal conflict but also closely monitor what is going on internationally in world politics. At the same time, society and the state must provide a well-structured, systematic and concrete second chance to newly released prisoners who were convicted of terrorism to make a new life for themselves. We have a chance to convert them as an agent of change within their own groups. If the government only provides them with false hope, their hatred toward the government will only increase and they will eventually return to their old ways.

The best metaphor to solve terrorism cases in Indonesia is like trying to cut a thorny rose. The use of a bulldozer to do this delicate task will ruin the existing beautiful garden. Instead, you need to get a pair of scissors and cut the rose carefully. I think the Jokowi government needs to re-read the motto of Pegadaian, an Indonesian government-owned corporation on fiduciary services that is always busy when the Lebaran festivities approach: 'Solving problems with no problem'.

*FOUNDER OF PRASASTI PERDA MAJALAH FOUNDATION AND CURRENTLY TAKING A PHD DEGREE IN POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATION STUDIES AT MONASH UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA



Historic Nahdlatul Ulama Congress a Battleground Between Opposing Forces:

Wide Range of Human Nature, and “Religious Impulse,” on Display

“In Indonesia, the congress was a major event. It opened with a speech by the country’s president; each day it was the lead item on TV news and in national newspapers. But apart from the presence of diplomats at the opening and reporting by specialized academics, it mostly passed unnoticed in the West.

“This is tragic, since a few days spent at the congress of the world’s largest Muslim organization would reshape most Westerners’ perception of Islam. While groups such as ISIS demand a many-sided, including military, response, long-term antidotes to growing Islamic extremism can only be found in organizations such as NU.

“Historically, NU, like Indonesia, has rarely sought a bigger place on the Islamic or world stage. But now, with the nation’s economy the largest in the Muslim world, and after eight successful democratic elections, both are reaching out, sponsoring reconciliation and educational programs in Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. There are even NU branches in the United States.

“As we continue to struggle with bloody chaos in much of the Middle East, Indonesia, and especially Indonesian Islam, needs our careful attention.”

~ Paul Marshall, *The Weekly Standard*, [“Among the Believers: A century-old mass organization cultivates an adaptable Islam”](#)

Background

The Nahdlatul Ulama held its 33rd national congress (*muktamar*) from 1 – 5 August 2015 in Jombang, East Java, to select its national leadership and establish an agenda for the next five years (2015 – 2020).



The theme of the event was *Meneguhkan Islam Nusantara untuk Peradaban Indonesia dan Dunia* (“Strengthening East Indies Islam for the Benefit of Indonesian and World Civilization”).

The term *Islam Nusantara* refers to the profoundly spiritual variant of Islam traditionally dominant throughout the Malay Archipelago, which cultivates noble character and virtue (*akhlakul karima*) among its adherents; respects and proactively defends cultural and religious diversity as a natural expression of God’s will; teaches that universal love and compassion are integral to religion; and that the primary message and purpose of Islam is to serve as a blessing for all creation. Given these characteristics, *Islam Nusantara* is inherently antithetical to the authoritarian/monolithic interpretation of religion propagated by Islamist extremists, who hate and fear the term.

Within Indonesia, both political opportunists and radicals are deliberately targeting the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—the world’s largest Muslim organization, with over 50 million followers and 14,000 madrasahs. Exit polls conducted during Indonesia’s 2014 national elections suggest that, in fact, as many as 80 million Indonesians may self-identify with the NU and its traditional understanding of Islam.

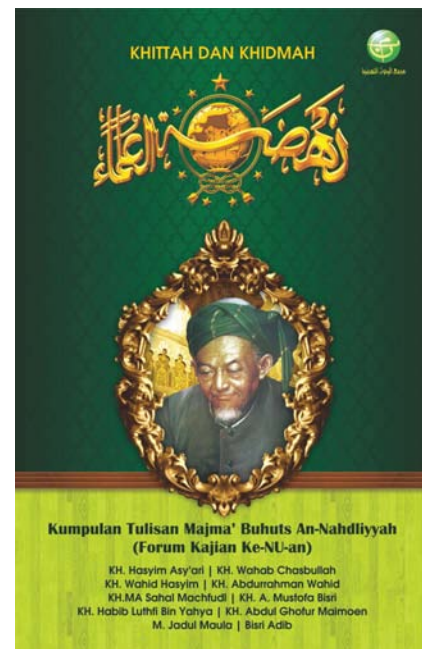
The NU has played a decisive role in every phase of Indonesian history, ever since the organization was founded in 1926, in direct response to the Saudi/Wahhabi conquest of Mecca and Medina. This role includes having mobilized traditional Sunni clerics to resist Wahhabi inroads; waging a successful war for independence against the Dutch; enshrining religious pluralism and tolerance as key pillars of the newly established state, in the form of Pancasila (“Five Principles”) and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (“Unity Amid Diversity”); mobilizing civil society to peacefully overthrow the Suharto dictatorship, and replace it with a democratic system founded upon respect for ethnic and religious minorities, human rights and freedom of the press; and steadfastly opposing extremist efforts to transform Indonesia into a so-called “Islamic” state.

Ironically, the very freedom and democracy established in Indonesia in 1998, with Nahdlatul Ulama support, has been systematically exploited by transnational Islamist movements and opportunistic political parties. Extremists have seized the chance to undermine Indonesia’s traditions of religious pluralism and tolerance, while political parties compete to mobilize the Nahdlatul Ulama’s enormous “vote bank,” consisting of NU followers heavily influenced by the NU’s local, regional and national leadership. The resulting infiltration and corruption of the NU’s organizational structure has seriously undermined the NU’s ability to maintain social and religious harmony within Indonesia, and vigorously counter the extremist ideology, and political opportunism, that threaten both the NU and Indonesia at large.

Ahlul Halli wal Aqdi
“Those who have a right to appoint and deny”

In response to this threat, the spiritual wing of the Nahdlatul Ulama—led by senior LibForAll/IIQS advisor [Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri](#)—has been systematically implementing a long-term strategy to strengthen the traditional values of the NU, so that it may continue to serve as an unshakable pillar of support for religious pluralism and diversity in Indonesia, while propagating these values throughout the Muslim world and helping to shape the future course of Western foreign policy in this critical arena. The promotion of *Islam Nusantara* is a key component of this strategic effort, as are calls for the NU to return to its founding principles and aspirations.

[*Khittah dan Khidmah Nahdlatul Ulama*](#) (*The Nahdlatul Ulama’s Founding Principles and Aspirations*), published by Majma’ Buhuts an-Nahdliyyah (the Forum for NU Teachings), which was established in 2004 by top NU spiritual figures including H.E. KH. Abdurrahman Wahid; KH. Sahal Mafudz; KH. A. Mustofa Bisri; KH. Dimiyati Rois; KH. Mafudz Ridwan; and KH. Muadz Thohir.



As an integral part of this strategy, senior NU clerics recommended adoption of a mechanism designed to “short-circuit” opportunistic/extremist intervention in selection of the organization’s leadership at its national congress (*muktamar*), held every five years. Ever since the fall of Suharto, an accelerating trend has emerged, in which politically- and economically-motivated individuals—who often have little knowledge of the NU’s traditional teachings, and little to no affiliation with its

network of *pesantren* (madrasahs)—have gained control of local NU chapters and leveraged this control for personal advantage. Simultaneously, many NU executive boards (*tanfidziyah*)—at a national, provincial and regional level—began acting independently of, and frequently in conflict with, their corresponding supreme councils (*syuriah*), which are meant to direct and control executive boards at each respective level of the NU.

Rather than direct election of the Chairman of the NU Supreme Council (*Rais Aam Syuriah PBNU*) by regional chapters vulnerable to the exercise of “money politics,” senior *ulama* (religious scholars) advised that the 33rd NU Congress employ a system devised by Umar bin Khattab, a companion to the Prophet Muhammad, to select his successor.

Known as *ahlul halli wal aqdi* (or AHWA), a consultative council of nine senior *ulama*—respected for their knowledge of Islamic law, humility and renunciation of self-interest—would be selected by *muktamar* delegates. These nine *ulama* would, in turn, deliberate among themselves and appoint a new Chairman of the NU Supreme Council.

This *ahlul halli wal aqdi* (AHWA) mechanism was used once before—at the 27th national congress held in 1984 in Situbondo, East Java—in order to prevent the Suharto regime from acquiring control of the NU via systematic vote buying and the intimidation of *muktamar* delegates. In fact, it was this historic *muktamar* that appointed LibForAll/IIQS co-founder [H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid](#) as General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board, from which strategic position he orchestrated the peaceful overthrow of Suharto’s regime (in 1998) and Indonesia’s transition to a pluralistic democracy.

Islam Nusantara

On June 15, approximately 40,000 NU followers gathered at Indonesia’s national mosque in Jakarta to attend an *istighotsah* ceremony, heralding the arrival of Ramadan (the fasting month within the Islamic calendar).



Entitled “Nurturing Spiritual Traditions; Safeguarding National Unity,” the ceremony was designed to launch a 2-day National Conference of NU religious scholars who gathered to make final preparations for the upcoming NU Congress to be held in August. *Rais Aam Syuriah PWNU* (Chairmen of the Supreme Council) for NU Provincial Chapters in 29 of the nation’s 34 provinces agreed to use the principle of *ahlul halli wal aqdi*, or AHWA, to select the Chairman of the NU Supreme Council at the Jombang *muktamar*.

The East Java and Central Java chapters of the NU—which represent the organization’s traditional heartland, where a majority of its followers reside—took the lead in embracing the concept of AHWA, and recommending its use at the 2015 *muktamar*, “in order to minimize the influence of external parties that wish to destroy the NU via ‘money politics’ (conducted by self-interested businessmen and political parties) and a [‘black campaign’](#) (conducted by Muslim extremists) against NU figures.”

Indonesian president Joko Widodo delivered the keynote address at the *istighotsah* ceremony, which was also attended by KH. Said Aqil Siradj (Chairman of the NU Executive Board); KH. Lukman Hakim Saifuddin (a prominent NU theologian who serves as Minister of Religion); Nusron Wahid (Chairman of Ansor, the NU’s Young Adults organization); Ibu Sinta Nuriyah Wahid (widow of former president and NU chairman H.E. KH. Abdurrahman Wahid); and KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf (Secretary for Political & International Affairs to the NU Supreme Council and Secretary to the *muktamar* planning committee).

“The NU has the primary responsibility for preserving and promoting *Islam Nusantara*,” said KH. Said Aqil Siradj during his introductory address. “*Islam Nusantara* was proselytized (by Muslim saints) who embraced local culture, strengthened and preserved local culture, respected local culture. They did not seek to destroy local culture (unlike Muslim extremists),” he told [BBC Indonesia](#).

President Jokowi's speech quickly went viral, garnering massive public attention via print, broadcast and internet/social media. "I am profoundly concerned by the political upheavals and bloodshed in the Muslim Middle East. Syria and Iraq are shaking violently (like buildings in an earthquake). Praise be to God, our Islam is *Islam Nusantara* (East Indies Islam)," proclaimed President Jokowi, as hundreds of media outlets reported the next day. "Islam that is gentle and polite. Islam that is civilized. *That is Islam Nusantara: Islam full of tolerance.*"

***Extremist Media: 33rd NU Congress is a Contest
Between the "Correct" and "Liberal" Wings of the NU***

A tight-knit alliance of opportunists and extremists, who had spent years laying the groundwork to acquire control of the NU Central Board, did not give up easily. As widely reported in Indonesia's media, the first three days of the *muktamar* were acrimonious and chaotic. Opponents accused AHWA supporters of distributing cash-filled envelopes to buy the election; of subverting the NU's bylaws; of perverting the teachings of Islam, through respect for and promotion of "*Islam Nusantara*"; and of intervention by the PKB (President Wahid's political party), whose leadership consists of numerous senior NU figures. Rendering these accusations all the more trenchant was the fact that the de facto spokesman of those who opposed AHWA was Salahuddin Wahid ("Gus Sholah"), younger brother of H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid and current head of Pondok Pesantren (Madrasah) Tebuireng in Jombang, East Java, where President Wahid, his father (KH. Wahid Hasyim) and his grandfather (NU co-founder KH. Hasyim Asy'ari) are buried.

A majority of those within the "inner circle" of the NU realized that Gus Sholah was closely allied to, and speaking for, Hasyim Muzadi, chairman of the NU executive board from 1999 – 2010, during whose term in office money politics became institutionalized within the NU. At the 2010 *muktamar* Hasyim Muzadi had sought, and failed, to attain the office of *Rais Aam*.

As in 2010, the Hasyim Muzadi/Gus Sholah alliance sought to transform the office of *Rais Aam* and *Syuriah PBNU* (the NU Supreme Council) from a body of senior spiritual *ulama* to one composed of professional managers, who need not be experts in the form, and substance, of Islamic teachings. This may be attributed, in part or in whole, to the fact that neither Hasyim Muzadi nor Gus Sholah are generally regarded within the NU as spiritual *ulama* (i.e., experts in the field of Islamic law who possess a high degree of spiritual attainment).

Historically, NU tradition has dictated that the office of *Rais Aam Syuriah PBNU* be occupied by the organization's most senior and respected religious scholar. Effectively divorced from that tradition and seeking to subvert it, Hasyim Muzadi conducted a multi-year "political campaign" for the office of *Rais Aam*, while his ally (Gus Sholah) sought the position of *Ketua Umum Tanfidziyah PBNU* (Chairman of the NU Executive Board).

Unaware of these circumstances, much of the national media and public at large were confused by Gus Sholah’s caustic attacks upon those who advocated the adoption of AHWA—conflating Gus Sholah’s views with those of Abdurrahman Wahid, when in fact President Wahid belonged to the spiritual wing of the NU and was emphatically opposed to opportunist/extremist attempts to infiltrate and subvert the NU’s founding principles and aspirations.

**“Gus Mus Descends from the Mountaintop”
and Brings Calm to NU Congress**



As reported by the nation’s leading news magazine (*Tempo*), after three days of dramatic conflict “Kyai Mustofa Bisri, or ‘Gus Mus,’ profoundly moved the hearts of NU *muktamar* participants with a speech. As he took the stage, the tumult of the crowd—which had been trembling on the brink of violence between competing factions—immediately fell silent. Gus Mus, who serves as Chairman of the NU Supreme Council, began to speak in a hoarse voice, with tears trickling down his cheeks. The head of Pondok Pesantren (Madrasah) Raudlatuh Tholibin in Rembang, Central Java, asked those in attendance to recollect and embody the sublime character and virtues displayed by [NU co-founder] Kyai Haji Hasyim Asy’ari and their other noble predecessors.

“What follows is the full text of Gus Mus’s speech at the NU Congress in Jombang delivered on Monday, 3 August 2015:

As I’ve followed the plenary sessions held over the past few days, I often found myself in tears, because the NU—which for so many generations has maintained its image as a religious organization, a living example of noble character and virtue, which often criticizes the ignoble practices of others—has been painted in the mass media as itself being rotten and corrupt. I am deeply ashamed before Almighty God; ashamed before Kyai Haji Hasyim Asy’ari, Kyai Haji Wahab Hasbullah, Kyai Haji

Bisri Syansuri and all of the great (spiritual) masters who came before us. This feeling of shame sickened me even further when I saw a newspaper headline that read, “NU Congress in Turmoil; Muhammadiyah Congress Tranquil.”

I ask that we once again read *Surah al-Fatihah* (the opening chapter of the Qur’an) in a state of sincere devotion (to God), asking for his (the Prophet Muhammad’s) intercession.

The *Rais Aam* who placed me in this role, Kyai Haji Sahal Mafudhz... Why did he die, imposing this enormous burden upon me? Lend me your ears and pray for me, for this is the last time I will occupy this [exalted] position, for which I am so unsuited.

Listen to me, as your supreme leader.

Please listen to me. With all respect, I would eagerly bow down and kiss the feet of each and every one of you, that together we may embrace and embody the sublime character and virtues exhibited by Kyai Haji Hasyim Asy’ari and those who came before us.

Earlier today I gathered the NU’s most senior *kyais* (religious scholars, or *ulama*), and their hearts are full of anguish. In this hallowed land [Jombang], which holds the earthly remains of our *kyais*, where the NU was founded... Do we wish to destroy and bury the NU here as well? Let us seek shelter in God!!! With a humble heart, I beg that you abandon all worldly considerations and reflect upon God, and upon those (saintly men) who established the Nahdlatul Ulama.

After having deliberated the situation, the senior *kyais* who gathered this afternoon agreed upon several points that should guide our subsequent discussions (within the *muktamar*).

There is one minor change from the decision reached in Jakarta [in June of 2015, when a preparatory conference of *ulama* agreed to employ AHWA to select a *Rais Aam*], which we agreed would provide a solution [to this conflict.]

If those attending this *muktamar* cannot agree to select a *Rais Aam* via a consultative council [AHWA], then the *Rais Aam Syuriah PBNU* (Chairman of the NU Supreme Council) will be elected through direct vote by all regional *Rais Aam*.

Our most senior *kyais* and I offer you this solution, for when you next meet in plenary session: if you can decide to do so, use the consultative process [AHWA] to select a *Rais Aam*. If not, use a direct voting process. That is what our organizational

bylaws dictate. This concerns the selection of a *Rais Aam* (Supreme Leader); thus, *kyais* should choose who will lead their fellow *kyais*.

Whichever of these two methods you choose should immediately be employed [to select a new *Rais Aam*]. If you refuse to accept this solution, then I will accept [responsibility for enforcing it], even though I am merely Mustofa Bisri, the [insignificant] human being struck down by the misfortune of becoming Kyai Sahal's successor. If you do not wish [to accept my ruling, or *fatwa*], then release me from this burden here and now.

Please pray that the burden of *Rais Aam* will pass from my hands, after this brief time [following Kyai Sahal's death].

I haven't slept for days, because I've been thinking constantly of you. I apologize and beg for your forgiveness, especially those who have travelled far and those who are elderly. Please forgive the members of the *muktamar* committee for how they've managed any technical details that may have disappointed you, and please forgive me. The fault is mine, and I hope you will forgive me."

CNN Indonesia:

["Gus Mus's Profoundly Moving Speech Restores NU Congress to Normal"](#)

Antara (Indonesia's national wire service):

["Fatwa from Chairman of NU Supreme Council Resolves Muktamar Deadlock"](#)

As widely reported in Indonesia's print and broadcast media—with major networks transmitting the speech in full, to a spellbound national audience—Mustofa Bisri's address dissolved the atmosphere of anger and recrimination that had dominated previous sessions of the *muktamar*. As one reporter noted:

Gus Mus's words, delivered in a soft and trembling voice, hypnotized the thousands of *muktamar* attendees who filled the plenary hall. Not a single tense expression could be seen upon anyone's face, unlike the previous night. In fact, nearly everyone appeared to be swept away by profound and heartfelt emotion...

After conveying his advice, Gus Mus left the stage and vanished from the meeting hall. Slamet Effendy Yusuf, chairman of the session, immediately seized the reins and asked the assembled delegates, "Is our revered elder's (i.e., Gus Mus's) proposal to alter paragraph 19 acceptable to you?"

“Yes!” the delegates exclaimed in unison.

The Vice Chairman of the NU Central Board, who had presided over the past three days’ chaotic meetings, cried “*Allahu Akbar!*” His voice on the verge of breaking as he struggled to restrain his tears, Slamet Effendy pronounced *shalawat* (praise and blessings) upon the Prophet Muhammad (saw.). At the same time, many of the delegates also broke into tears and stood to embrace one another while crying profusely.

The following day, the assembled *Rais Aam Syuriah PWNNU* (Chairmen of the Supreme Council) for NU Provincial Chapters voted 252 to 239 to alter the NU bylaws and adopt *ahlul halli wal aqdi* (AHWA) as the mechanism for selection of *Rais Aam Syuriah PBNU* (Chairman of the NU Supreme Council) at the current and future *muktamars*.

The assembly also voted to extend this leadership selection mechanism (AHWA) throughout the formal structure of the NU—i.e., for senior *ulama* to appoint future members of the supreme council (*syuriah*) and executive board (*tanfidziyah*) at the national, provincial, regency, sub-regency and village levels—in order to restore the traditional synergy between the *syuriah* (whose members should be among the most senior and respected *ulama* within any given geographic area) and *tanfidziyah* (whose members should be skilled executors possessed of moral integrity, who act at the behest of senior *ulama*).

By implementing these changes, the spiritual wing of the Nahdlatul Ulama hopes to insulate the organization from money politics and the de facto corruption that have plagued its leadership structure since the advent of democracy in 1999. In other words, the adoption of *ahlul halli wal aqdi* is intended to restore the NU’s foundational principles (*khittah*) and aspirations for the betterment of humanity (*khidmah*); prevent (or at least hinder) its exploitation by opportunists as a vehicle for the attainment of wealth and power; and enable the NU to once again serve as a voice of moral authority—acting as an effective check on the abuse of government power and the spread of Islamist extremism.

Acting in accordance with its decision to adopt AHWA, the assembly elected nine of the NU’s most senior and respected *ulama* to form a consultative council, whose members swiftly and unanimously agreed to appoint KH. A. Mustofa Bisri as Chairman of the NU Supreme Council.

The disappointed alliance of opportunists and extremists—seeing their opportunity to control the NU slip away—stormed out of the official assembly and gathered at the famous nearby *pesantren* (madrasah) Tebuireng, where they accused KH. A. Mustofa Bisri of having manipulated congress attendees the previous night with his “crocodile tears” and “insincere speech,” and condemned the *muktamar* committee for allegedly violating NU bylaws.

These [widely reported developments](#) were soon followed by the news that Mustofa Bisri had refused to accept his appointment as chairman of the NU Supreme Council. As reported by [Metro TV](#) and hundreds of other media outlets, KH. Mustofa Bisri sent the consultative council a letter composed in *pegon* (Arabic script used to write Javanese and Malay), which read as follows:

As we know, our congress has been and continues to be somewhat chaotic. This is due to the existence of competing factions, both of which want their “champion” to become *Rais Aam*. One seeks to influence *muktamar* attendees to elect person A, the other to choose person B. And the members of one group regard the *ahlul halli wal aqdi* system as a (purely pragmatic) instrument employed by the other faction (to secure victory).

Because of these circumstances, and in order to ensure the well-being of the Nahdlatul Ulama—as well as to nurture and safeguard both groups—it would be best for the consultative council of senior *ulama* (*ahlul halli wal aqdi*) not to select either of the two persons (A or B) championed by these respective factions. Let the position of *Rais Aam* be given to a member of the consultative council who most closely approximates the (exalted) criteria (required of a *Rais Aam Syuriah PBNU*).

As for the General Chairman of the Executive Board: let the chosen *Rais Aam* give his blessing to all candidates for this position (i.e., permit them to run), so that *muktamar* participants can have the satisfaction of voting for their chosen candidate, whoever that might be.

Mustofa Bisri’s letter subtly but clearly suggested that the position of *Rais Aam* be given to the most senior figure on the consultative council, KH. Maemun Zubair (photo, below), who replied by insisting that KH. Mustofa Bisri himself should hold the position, being the most qualified to do so.



As neither Kyai Bisri nor Kyai Maemun were willing to assume a role within the formal structure of the NU that implied spiritual precedence and authority vis-à-vis the other—nor be seen to “benefit” from the highly distasteful process the nation had witnessed—the consultative council (*ahlul halli wal aqdi*) appointed a less senior figure to the position of *Rais Aam Syuriah PBNU* (Chairman of the NU Supreme Council). The new *Rais Aam*, KH. Ma’ruf Amin, was a founding member of the governing board of the PKB (President Wahid’s political party); influential figure at the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI); and adviser on religious affairs to Indonesia’s 6th president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

*An “Imperfect Outcome”
at a Congress “Guarded by Angels and Spirits”?*

Despite a natural human tendency to contrast the imperfections of reality with an idealized concept of how things should be, the actual choice that public figures often confront is between greater and lesser evils.

From the perspective of [Muslim extremists](#), the 33rd NU Congress held in Jombang, East Java, was a disaster. The opportunist/extremist alliance painstakingly assembled by Hasyim Muzadi over the past five years not only failed to secure control of the NU Central Board; its members were completely shut out of any positions of authority. Future selection of the NU’s leadership will be in the hands of senior *ulama* who are (hopefully) insulated from money politics. The [new board](#) has embraced the concept of *Islam Nusantara* (East Indies Islam), and will seek to promote its values both domestically and internationally, as a living, breathing alternative to radical Islam.

Also of great significance were decisions made by the NU’s Bahtsul Masa’il Commission, which deliberates major issues from the perspective of Islamic law. In an article entitled [“Gus Mus’s Charisma and the Secret Behind the Greatness of the NU’s 33rd National Congress,”](#) a participant describes how the Bahtsul Masa’il Commission overcame Wahhabi-tinged objections to reaffirm a crucial decision made during KH. Abdurrahman Wahid’s term as NU Chairman: that is, to reopen the doors of *ijtihad* (“independent reasoning”) and engage in *istinbath* (“digging into the source—i.e., the Qur’an and Sunnah—so that new interpretations of Islamic law may emerge”).

The importance of this decision, in light of current world developments—including ISIS and al-Qaeda’s use of Islamic law to justify their actions—should not be underestimated. With over 14,000 *pesantren* (madrasahs) and an enormous network of *ulama* trained in the classical traditions of Sunni Islam, both formal and spiritual, the NU represents the largest single body of religious scholars in the Muslim world positioned to address this vital issue.

That said, the formal structure of the NU is plagued by managerial weakness characteristic of a rural-based organization, and key positions remain occupied by individuals more concerned with

their personal or political agenda than with pressing issues that threaten the well-being of humanity as a whole.

Even more worrisome, from the perspective of spiritual *ulama*, was the highly politicized nature of the recent congress in Jombang, which they believe reflects a state of profound moral and spiritual decay within the NU itself. In their view, exemplary behavior arises spontaneously from nobility of character, and it is the primary responsibility of religious leaders to inculcate *akhlakul karima* (sublime character and virtue) in those who profess to embrace Islam.

The formal structure of the Nahdlatul Ulama is an institution, like any other. As such, it is distinct from the actual grass-roots membership that its institutional leaders often claim to represent. In fact, throughout its history NU members have exhibited far greater attachment and loyalty to those they regard as wielding spiritual authority, than institutional authority. Only when these two overlap—as in the case of NU founders KH. Hasyim Asy’ari (1926 – 1947) and KH. Wahab Hasbullah (1947 – 1971), or KH. Abdurrahman Wahid during his term as chairman of the NU executive board (1984 – 1999)—does the NU community at large unite behind its institutional leadership.

This vivid distinction between institutional and spiritual authority has been repeatedly demonstrated in the results of Indonesian elections over the past 15 years. For example, Hasyim Muzadi failed to attract a significant number of NU followers when he ran for Vice President with Megawati Sukarnoputri in 2004, despite the fact that he was General Chairman of the NU Executive Board.



With his refusal to accept the position of *Rais Aam*, KH. A. Mustofa Bisri cemented his status as the foremost spiritual *‘alim* (religious scholar) in the Nahdlatul Ulama, and the natural successor to H.

E. KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (1940 – 2009), whose grave in Jombang, East Java, has become one of the most heavily-visited pilgrimage sites in the world (photo, above).



After declining the position of *Rais Aam*, KH. A. Mustofa Bisri visited the graves of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, KH. Wahid Hasyim and KH. Abdurrahman Wahid at Pondok Pesantren Tebuireng in Jombang, East Java. As widely reported by the media, Mustofa Bisri sat upon the ground as a common pilgrim (photo, above) and wept as he asked forgiveness for his inability to rise to the stature of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari and KH. Wahab Hasbullah, whom he believes exemplified the qualities required in a *Rais Aam*.

Yet as the renowned Indonesian composer, musician and author/Sufi mystic Kyai Haji Emha Ainun Nadjib wrote in his book *Air Zamzam di Negeri Comberan (Water from the Sacred Well of Zamzam, in a Muddy Country)*: “Gus Mus is a true *mufti* [a master of Sunni Muslim scholarship and jurisprudence]. But he is too humble [to pride himself on this fact]. Yet *al-mufti* is indeed his quality, and his spiritual stature in life.”

Preserving and Promoting the Values of Islam Nusantara



[Leadership of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council and Executive Board \(2015 – 2020\) at Indonesia’s presidential palace with President Joko Widodo on August 27, 2015.](#)

KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf—KH. Mustofa Bisri’s nephew and a former presidential spokesman for KH. Abdurrahman Wahid—was appointed General Secretary to the Supreme Council for the 2015 – 2020 period. In this position, he will serve as the primary interlocutor between the NU Supreme Council and its Executive Board, as well as coordinating with the NU’s advisory board, whose senior-most figures include KH. Maemun Zubair and KH. A. Mustofa Bisri.

Among the significant developments that followed in the wake of the NU Congress was the selection of new leadership by the Indonesian Council of Religious Scholars (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, or MUI). MUI is a quasi-autonomous organization created by the Suharto government in 1982, in order to provide a mantle of religious legitimacy to its authoritarian regime, which never succeeded in controlling either of Indonesia’s largest Islamic organizations, the Nahdlatul Ulama or the Muhammadiyah.

After the fall of Suharto, MUI was heavily infiltrated by Muslim extremists who used the organization to propagate a harsh interpretation of Islam, including the demonization of religious minorities such as Shi’ites and Ahmadiyah.

At a national congress held on August 26 and 27 in Surabaya, East Java, the MUI elected the Nahdlatul Ulama’s new *Rais Aam*, KH. Ma’ruf Amin, as its Chairman for the 2015 – 2020 period. The MUI also appointed three figures, noted for their engagement with and protection of religious

minorities, to its Policy Council (*Dewan Pertimbangan*). Religious extremists remarked, with horror, that a number of firm “defenders of Islam” have been cast out of MUI leadership positions and replaced by “defenders of heretics and infidels including Shi’ites, Ahmadiyyah and even the author Anand Krishna... whose books—which are inimical to a clear understanding of Islam—are published by the Catholic media group Kompas/Gramedia.” Anand Krishna was unjustly imprisoned in 2012, much to the satisfaction of Muslim extremists, who feared his appeal to Muslim youth and his friendship with Islamic leaders such as President Abdurrahman Wahid and KH. Nasaruddin Umar (Deputy Minister of Religion and one of the newly-appointed members of the MUI Policy Council).

In stark contrast to the reaction of extremists, Indonesia’s mainstream press welcomed these developments within the MUI, which are consistent with the highly pluralistic traditions of *Islam Nusantara*. As [The Jakarta Post](#) noted in an article headlined “New MUI Chairman to embrace beleaguered minority groups”:

Ma’ruf said that he was determined to change the image of the MUI from a bulwark of conservatism to a moderate institution. He said that minority sects, especially Ahmadiyyah and Shia Islam, which many Indonesian Muslims deem “deviant” from mainstream Islam, would be embraced by the MUI under his watch. “We will not tolerate any persecution [of minority religious groups in Indonesia]. The new MUI will try its best to prohibit and even to prevent [any form of persecution] from happening. The new MUI will campaign for religious harmony without any form of violence,” Ma’ruf told *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday night, just hours after his election.

This reflects a turnaround not only for the MUI, but also for KH. Mar’uf Amin himself, who has been closely involved with the MUI for years.

These developments—within the Nahdlatul Ulama and MUI—are strongly supported by the administration of Indonesian President Joko Widodo, whose electorate and ministerial appointments are, by and large, closely aligned with the traditions of *Islam Nusantara*.

These traditions include the *Ramayana* and *Bharatayuda* (or *Mahabharata*)—Hindu literary epics that have become deeply rooted within Javanese and Indonesian society as a whole. The central event within the *Bharatayuda* is a climactic battle between the opposing forces of *dharma* (“right action”) and *adharma* (“wrong action,” which gives rise to social chaos). These opposing forces are embodied in the Pandavas—five highly principled and remarkably united brothers, who are disciples of Krishna (an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu)—and their cousins the Kauravas—one hundred quarrelsome brothers who are driven by ego and naked self-interest.

Yet as President Wahid—a lifelong aficionado of *wayang kulit*, or Javanese shadow puppet theater—once remarked to his friend KH. Mustofa Bisri: “*Kurawa adalah orang-orang yang belum*

diPandawakan.” That is, “The Kauravas are simply human beings who have not yet attained the spiritual realization of the Pandavas.”

From the perspective of *Islam Nusantara*, the same may be said of those whose religious enthusiasm outstrips their spiritual wisdom, or who seek to promote an exclusive ‘in-group’ by encouraging their fellow Muslims to demonize and ‘oppose’ others—rather than view Islam as harmonious with, and complementary to, other faiths.

WaLlahu A‘lam. God alone knows the truth of all things.

Ki Yusuf: NU Congress Guarded by Thousands of Angels and Spirits

By Dian Kurniawan, 01 August 2015 at 15:58 GMT+7



Ki Yusuf “Cokro Santri,” Senior Instructor at Nusa Pagar Sapujagad (News at 6/Dian Kurniawan)

News at 6 (SCTV) reporting from Jombang—During the 33rd Nahdlatul Ulama Congress in Jombang, East Java, several candidates for the position of Executive Board Chairman and Chairman of its Supreme Council are expected to wage psychological and occult warfare—seeking to win the hearts of Congress delegates and bend them to their will, in order to gain control of the NU for the next five years.

Ki Yusuf “Cokro Santri”—a senior instructor at Pagar Nusa Sapujagad (a branch of the Nahdlatul Ulama dedicated to indigenous martial arts)—conveyed this information to *News at 6*. He says that the huge NU gathering, held once every five years, will be guarded by thousands of angels and Muslim spirits who have assembled from every corner of the earth.

“Their objective is to neutralize anticipated negative energies and foster a peaceful and conducive atmosphere, so that the Congress [which will determine the NU’s leadership and agenda for the next five years] will have a beneficial impact upon the people of the East Indies Archipelago and the world at large,” Ki Yusuf told *News at 6* in Jombang, East Java on Saturday (1 August 2015).

“We performed an energy adjustment, to neutralize the possibility of negative supernatural forces disrupting the Congress,” he said, [adding that he and his colleagues had performed several rituals, including the burial of a mixture of essential plant oils at the center of the great public square (*alun-alun*) where the Congress will meet].

Ki Yusuf emphasized that personnel from his institution had received official authorization [from Congress organizers] to perform this security duty, weeks before the Congress began.

“There are visible security personnel [i.e., thousands of police, military and NU militia members] guarding the site, as well as invisible security personnel. The latter include formidable Muslim spirits and angels. These supernatural forces consist not only of those who reside in the Land of Java or Indonesia, but also many who’ve gathered from every corner of the earth, especially those who feel a sympathetic resonance with our objective,” he emphasized.

Ki Yusuf explained that he had received assistance from many village *kyais* (religious leaders) who are eager to help safeguard the Congress. They regularly perform Islamic rituals useful for that purpose.



The atmosphere during a prayer gathering held in Jakarta on Thursday (30/7/2015) petitioning God for a successful 33rd NU Congress, which will be held in Jombang from 1 – 5 August. (News at 6/Johan Tallo)

“They are spiritually-gifted *kyais* [often associated with former Indonesian president and NU chairman, KH. Abdurrahman Wahid]. Both their number, and their supernatural powers, are significant. They feel an incredible love and devotion to the Nahdlatul Ulama, but don’t wish to attract public attention to themselves [due to their humility],” he explained.

Ki Yusuf said that about 300 Pagar Nusa personnel—from throughout East Java, Central Java, West Java and Banten—are in Jombang helping to safeguard the Congress, “including a team of spiritually-gifted *kyais* and invisible, or supernatural, forces.”

The 33rd NU Congress will be held from 1 – 5 August in four historic *pesantren* (madrasahs) in Jombang, namely, Tebuireng, Tambakberas, Darul Ulum and Denanyar.

This evening, at around 7 p.m., President Jokowi is scheduled to open the congress at the great public square of Jombang, East Java. (Mvi/Ali)

<http://news.liputan6.com/read/2284229/ki-yusuf-muktamar-nu-dijaga-ribuan-malaikat-dan-jin>

Liputan6 is a popular news program broadcast on one of Indonesia's largest commercial television networks, SCTV.



Monday, 03 August 2015 00:00

Tabletop exercise takes whole of society approach to foreign terrorist fighter threat



Participants of the Combating Terrorism Working Group Foreign Fighter Table Top Exercise role play a whole of society approach to scenarios depicting foreign fighter recruitment, travel abroad, and return to one's home country. *Amanda Moncada*

Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany (August 3, 2015) – In response to a growing Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) threat, 80 practitioners and researchers from over 40 countries conducted a tabletop exercise (TTX) from 29-30 July at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. The exercise was designed to train participants and develop actionable recommendations regarding FTF recruitment, travel, and return.

The exercise, co-sponsored by the Partnership for Peace Consortium (PfPC) Combating Terrorism Working Group (CTWG) and the London-based Asia Pacific Foundation, featured a diverse cross section from government, academia, law enforcement, business, religious, civic society, and NGO communities, and featured role playing to several realistic foreign fighter scenarios. The TTX format utilized was based on the Global Counterterrorism Forums' (GCTF) Hague-Marrakech Memorandum, which according to the U.S. State Department is "intended to inform and guide interested governments as they develop comprehensive policies, programs, and approaches to address the FTF phenomenon."

Exercise participants role-played various government and civil society characters in three fictitious foreign fighter scenarios, each revealing different motivations, backgrounds, and triggers to radicalization. The first scenario introduced a young woman lured by the prospect of marriage to a Da'esh warrior. The second scenario involved a depressed, disillusioned young male adult taken under the wings of local radicalized Muslims, drawn by the promises of the "Caliphate". The last scenario involved a young male adult, seduced into radicalization by online teachings eventually leading to joining extremist fighters in Syria and then returning home. According to Dr. Raphael Perl, Executive Director of the PfPC, "the three scenarios, while fictitious, are a representative cross section of real world case studies, and fostered the very sort of critical thinking that is needed to address the FTF problem."

Such scenarios enabled participants to consider the FTF threat through the lenses of three phases of the foreign fighter phenomenon: 1) Prevention – steps to prevent radicalization in the first place, through positive engagement, 2) Intervention – the mobilization of a radicalized person, with plans to support violent extremist causes, and 3) Mitigation – actions to take upon the return of a foreign fighter to their home country.

Professor Alex Schmid, the Director of the Terrorism Research Initiative in Vienna, noted that "the exercise brought together a variety of organizations, resulting in synergies across related research efforts, whereby the end result is greater than the constituent parts".



Mr. C Holland Taylor (left, above), co-founder, chairman and CEO of the LibForAll Foundation - a leading NGO developing counter-extremism strategies worldwide – remarked on the PfPC’s unique ability to “assemble people from a diverse set of backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, and religions,” and that “the PfPC succeeded at facilitating a frank and honest discussion about the threat posed by violent extremism and did so in a manner that is conducive to developing a societal consensus necessary to meet this threat.”

The CWTG TTX led to consensus on several ways to prevent, intervene and mitigate the FTF threat. In particular, participants were united in articulating the need to carry out more effective counter-propaganda campaigns. Professor Schmid emphasized that we need “dialogue with returning fighters, some of whom did not engage in fighting, but instead returned on their own accord, shocked by the brutal reality they faced upon arrival abroad. By capturing their stories and propagating them as part of a broad counter propaganda effort, we can dispel the Utopian promises that are at the heart of Da’esh and other violent extremist messaging.”

Other participant’s echoed Professor Schmid’s emphasis on developing counter narratives. Professor Peter Forster, Associate Dean of the College of Information Sciences and Technology at The Pennsylvania State University, and co-chairperson of the CTWG, expressed the need to “erode the message of Da’esh by communicating the corrupted, unauthentic version of Islam that Da’esh espouses.”

Developing counter narratives alone is not sufficient to turn the tide on extremist propaganda. How the narratives are conveyed is also an important consideration. Mr. Zahed Amanullah from the London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) said “Da’esh uses emotions in their stories, and so we have to use emotions in ours.” Towards this end, ISD has partnered with filmmakers in order to convey stories compellingly.

In addition to the emphasis on counter narratives, participants highlighted the role of women as well as the need for interfaith dialogues. Dr. Edit Schlaffer, founder of the Vienna-based NGO Women without Borders, emphasized that “mothers play an especially important role in understanding the FTF phenomena, as they have unique insight into nearly all aspects of their children’s lives”. Dr. Schlaffer spoke of the importance of trust when mothers seek to prevent or undo radicalization of their children. According to Dr. Schlaffer, based on a poll assessing where mothers place trust, 94% of respondents place the most trust in other mothers, while only 39% and 29% trust governments and law enforcement, respectively. As such, Dr. Schlaffer calls upon local governments and law enforcement to recognize and engage mothers in their unique role as key security allies.

Interfaith dialogues are increasingly important in helping communities address underlying factors and drivers that promote radicalization to violence. Several religious leaders participated in the TTX, emphasizing the need for communities to identify and partner with trusted religious leaders, as opposed to self-professed, un-credentialed preachers, who may seek to corrupt a religion's true tenets for hateful purposes. Some participants spoke of programs whereby local governments and religious leaders cooperate on the establishment of certification criteria for religious leaders. Other leaders advocated for reciprocal youth exchange programs through which people of different faiths would have opportunities to live in one another's cultural and religious environments, thereby developing mutual respect for one another's faith.

Exercise participants furthermore agreed that interfaith dialogue not only promotes tolerance and respect among religions, but opens the doorway to a future of constructive interfaith cooperation on the basis of shared interests, thereby undoing an “us” versus “them” mindset. Additionally, interfaith

dialogues promote the roles of education, gender, and youth, as well as use the stories of disillusioned former fighters to create positive strategic messages to counter FTF radicalization.

The CTWG TTX showed variety in the backgrounds of its participants as well as in the age groups represented, a quality of the exercise that Dr. Sajjan Gohel, Director for International Security at the Asia Pacific Foundation, and Visiting Teacher at the London School of Economics and Political Science, views as critical to countering radicalization of foreign fighters. Dr. Gohel noted that “the youth of today’s generation understand the dynamics of social media and we need to consult with them in order to understand the methods and processes used to indoctrinate young, impressionable people.”

Participation by recent graduates in fields such as International Relations and International History facilitated the very sort of youth engagement advocated for by Dr. Gohel. Tyler Zurisko, a graduate from The Pennsylvania State University, and Jacqueline Sutherland and Charlotte Jordan, both graduates of the London School of Economics and Political Science, were unanimous in their appreciation for the genuine interest that exercise participants expressed in better understanding youth perspectives.

This week’s TTX was the first in what is anticipated to be an ongoing series of exercises designed to help drive towards consensus on the FTF problem. According to Professor Forster, “This was the first time that I am aware of that such an exercise has been conducted, and we are looking forward to conducting similar exercises, which we will refine based on this week’s valuable experience.”

Richard Prosen, co-chairperson of the CTWG, observed that “Addressing FTF threats remains a difficult, generational challenge, but not an insurmountable one. We can only achieve success if we stand united to confront these pressing and complex threats by partnering through our governments and regional institutions and engaging with local communities, civil society, women, youth, and the private sector.”

The CTWG is currently producing a report, summarizing the exercise’s key recommendations in the areas of strategic messaging, policies, and community programs, which will be made available to the general public in the upcoming weeks.

For more information on the Partnership for Peace Consortium and the Combating Terrorism Working Group, visit <http://www.pfp-consortium.org>. For more information on the Marshall Center, visit <http://www.marshallcenter.org>.

http://pfp-consortium.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=195:tabletop-exercise-takes-whole-of-society-approach-to-foreign-terrorist-fighter-threat&Itemid=101

Indonesia's Secret: In the Kingdom of Gentle Islam

By Erich Follath | August 13, 2015



AP/dpa

Nowhere in the world are there more Muslims living in one place than in the Southeast Asian island nation of Indonesia, which will be a guest of honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair this fall. Can a cosmopolitan faith assert itself against Islam? A journey.

He rocks, in the truest sense of the word. He plays bass guitar and is both a fan and friend of Metallica. Early in the morning, or sometimes late at night, he likes to spontaneously go out and mingle among the people. He listens to the problems of the poorest living in the slums, promising them swift relief. Indonesia's President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, 54, is a pious Muslim who doesn't speak publicly about his faith. "That's private," he says. His countrymen call him "Jokowi Superstar." For many, he is a source of inspiration and hope.

Few politicians have had such a career. Jokowi was born a carpenter's son and went on to become a forestry student and furniture dealer. Indeed, his humble beginnings make him something of a phenomenon in a country dominated by wealthy families and the military. His first public office was as mayor of his provincial hometown of Surakarta, followed by his great leap to the governor's office in Jakarta. In October 2014, he was elected president of Indonesia.

The country he leads is a leading global economy, a member of the G-20 and boasts more than 250 million inhabitants. Only China, India and the United States have more people. But there's something else about this country that leaves the world in awe: No other country in the world has as many Muslims as Indonesia. Almost 90 percent of the population follows Islam -- more than in the Maghreb, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states combined.

There have, to be sure, been sporadic attacks by Islamist fanatics, the worst leaving more than 200 people dead on the vacation island of Bali in 2002. There are also signs of growing Islamization:

The sale of alcohol has been restricted and headscarves are becoming more prevalent. Since 2009, however, there have been no more major attacks. News of Islamic State terror sounds like it's from another world. The Islam of the Far East is proof that the strict rules of the Koran and the freedoms of democratic society are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Should the rest of the Islamic world learn from that "spirit of tolerance," as described by US President Barack Obama, a man who spent part of his childhood in Jakarta?

Jokowi's tenure as president has not got off to a particularly impressive start. Treated as the world's next "tiger economy," resource-rich Indonesia's GDP is set to grow by only 5 percent by the end of this year, rather than the 7 percent Jokowi promised during his election campaign. The president's decision to execute foreign drug smugglers has damaged the country's relations with Australia and the European Union. He has also proven to be surprisingly tough with regard to Muslim refugees from Burma. And his promise to fight corruption, something his country so desperately needs, hasn't yet borne fruit. Jokowi has only really lived up to his platform on one point: He has defended religious freedoms against radicals who want Indonesia to impose Sharia and dissolve its liberal constitution.

Jokowi appointed a Christian as his successor to the governor's post in Jakarta, a man who belongs to the country's Chinese minority. "What's wrong with that?" he says of the nomination. Perhaps President Jokowi is a step ahead of his people in that respect.

Not Exactly Rosy

Those who conflate the words "Islamic" with "fanatic," "backwards" and "anti-modern" are quickly refuted by 40-year-old Yenny Wahid. She knows no reservations when it comes to the West, other religions or the latest high-tech gadgetry. As a meeting point, she suggests a Starbucks located in a glitzy shopping mall. She sports an Apple Watch and jeans and her headscarf, loosely bound, seems more like a fashion accessory than a religious statement. She laughs easily and shows off a video on her iPhone of a transvestite clown. When it comes to her faith, however, she gets serious very quickly.



Muhammad Fadli/ DER SPIEGEL

Yenny Wahid is a Muslim politician in Indonesia who promotes equality among religions. The Wahid Foundation, which she heads, strives to abolish prejudices against the various religious communities and foster understanding for all that is "foreign."

She knows that the situation on the religious front is not exactly rosy. For years, Yenny Wahid worked as general secretary for the National Awakening Party, or PKB, which has now formed a coalition with Jokowi. Several Islamic parties have managed to enter parliament, collectively attracting around a third of the votes. The moderate PKB was the only faith-based group to have seen a significant jump, garnering 9 percent of the vote.

"Unfortunately there continue to be a number of attacks against other religious communities. Catholics in the city of Bogor were forbidden from building a church and priests had to defend themselves against a mob," Wahid says. "But Christianity is protected in Indonesia as an equal religion, while members of the Ahmadiyya faith are regarded as heretics because they don't believe that Muhammad was the last prophet of God." The Muslim Council has called upon the Ahmadiyya to renounce their "heresy." Wahid finds this outrageous.

Wahid, a liberal, is also not fond of the fact that men who drink alcohol or "lewdly" dressed women are flogged in the largely autonomous province of Aceh. Her parents taught her to be tolerant. Wahid studied in Jakarta and, later, at Harvard, going on to work as a correspondent. In 1998, her father Abdurrahman Wahid founded the PKB. One year later, he was unexpectedly elected as a compromise candidate to the presidency of Indonesia. After he succumbed to blindness, his daughter assisted him with state visits. It was at his side that she met Yasser Arafat and Jiang Zemin. Soon, despite considerable efforts to rein in the excesses of the Indonesian military, her father was no longer able to remain in office. His resignation was attributed to political intrigue.

The Wahid Foundation, which she heads, strives to abolish prejudices against the various religious communities and foster understanding for all that is "foreign." She organizes meetings for women and helps them sell their wares at markets. The foundation also gives out loans to projects -- under the condition that they employ members of different religions.

Meanwhile, Wahid, who has three young daughters, has withdrawn from the party. But she says she follows Jokowi's politics very closely and has great hopes for him, "despite his initial stumbles and the many obstacles that are put in his path." And yes, she was asked whether she would be interested in a position in the government.

She tells of a phenomenon that she says awakens both hope and fear inside her. Indonesia, the land of Wayang shadow puppetry and an oral tradition, has discovered books. "But my countrymen don't read anything that could actually broaden their horizons. They pounce on religious conservative propaganda literature," she says. That includes the Indonesian variant of Rosamunde Pilcher, plus family and romance novels that present Islam as an answer for everything. "And this even though we have such great authors with such intriguing subjects."

But there are counterexamples -- books that have been successful despite their progressive content.

The Scene of a Miracle

The island of Belitung, an hour's flight from Jakarta to the northeast of Java, is little-known among most Indonesians. It's not even an insider tip for tourists, despite having several beautiful beaches. Indeed, if it weren't for the writer Andrea Hirata, 39, it would have likely remained terra incognita. For millions of enthusiastic readers, however, Belitung has become something of a home away from home. The scene of a miracle.



Muhammad Fadli/ DER SPIEGEL

Hirata's novel is largely autobiographical, chronicling the challenges of growing up in poverty. "For a daily wage of less than a dollar, my father shoveled radioactive sand full of tin," Hirata writes. "That my mother was able to keep eight children from starving was a miracle worthy of UNESCO recognition."

"Laskar Pelangi" -- "The Rainbow Troops" -- was the name of his first, largely autobiographical novel. After it was released in 2005, it sold 5 million copies and became the best-selling book in the country's history. Translated into 34 languages, it earned Hirata an American literature prize. A German edition was published in 2013.

The story is as simple as it is moving. For children on the island, whose parents worked as fisherman or toiled in tin mines, there was little chance of education in the 1980s. Their lives seemed predetermined. "For a daily wage of less than a dollar, my father shoveled radioactive sand full of tin," Hirata writes. "That my mother was able to keep eight children from starving was a miracle worthy of UNESCO recognition."

Yet an opportunity arises for him and his friends. An older, engaged teacher and his young colleague found an Islamic school on their own initiative. The "rainbow troops" flock there every morning, lest they miss a single lesson, no matter if the chalk is in low supply, the notepads worn, the chairs rickety and the structure itself at risk of collapsing. Most come on old bicycles, undertaking hours-long journeys over hilly terrain, wading through rivers where crocodiles lurk.

They dream of the capital none of them have ever visited, but also of London and Paris -- places they know from listening to the news over their transistor radio. And they work hard at school, helping the weakest among them to keep up. But the "Rainbow Troops" is not only a success story: Lintang, the most talented of the boys, is forced to break off his education after the death of his father in order to earn money for his large family by working as a porter -- at the age of 12.

"You'll encounter a boy named Ikal among the schoolchildren. Ikal means curly hair. That boy is me," Hirata says. "One rainy morning, I saw my teacher, a slender, young woman, as she hurried across the schoolyard. She was holding a banana leaf over her head to protect herself from the rain. In that moment I swore to myself that one day, when I was an adult, I would write a book to thank her for everything."

He kept his promise. The book, with all its unforgettable characters and its funny and sad twists and turns, is a monument to those teachers and pupils. But how does life go on after that? Could a sequel enchant readers the same way?

Spellbound

It's a two-hour drive from the small island capital Tanjung Pandan to the village of Gantung. There is a house adjacent to the local mosque, colorfully painted with a garden. The rooms are packed with memories of the rainbow troops. There are guitars on the walls and bikes hung on a clothesline. "Indonesia's first literature museum," reads a sign at the entrance. A cafe invites visitors to relax among banana trees. This is what Pippi Longstocking's Villa Villekulla could have looked like.

Out back is the school that Hirata built after the decrepit structure of yore was slated for demolition. The landlord stands at the blackboard, his long, black curls protruding from beneath a newsboy cap. It's time for English exercises with the students. He patiently corrects their pronunciation. "One step toward education is a hundred steps toward civilization," he says. "I hope I can inspire you," is written on the wall. "I didn't have a chance either and I still made it."

His book, "The Dreamer," was released in Germany in March. Both educational and autobiographical, it tells the continuing story of the rainbow children. While at secondary school, Hirata also worked in the harbors. After graduation, he moved to Jakarta in a ship meant for transporting livestock. There, he attended college and earned money doing various odd jobs. A scholarship from the EU got him to Paris before he returned to the University of Jakarta to complete a degree in economics. The book also tells of how he found his first love.

In the evenings, when people gathered to break their fasts during Ramadan, Hirata, a pious Muslim, invites all the children and youths to the museum's cafe. The atmosphere is festive and peaceful. Oil lamps have been placed along the roadside, their glow meant to show the angels the way when they come down to Earth. A young man and his girlfriend are playing guitar and Hirata reads aloud in his melodious voice. Everyone listens as if spellbound.

Andrea Hirata writes like Henri Rousseau painted at the beginning of the last century. He is undeterred and uneducated; he is at the same time self-taught, naïve and a magical realist. Hirata gave up his well-paid position at an Indonesian telephone company in order to be able to fully dedicate himself to his writing. He uses the museum and the school lessons to give back to his village what it gave him: the gift of learning.

Confronting a Violent Past

There can hardly be starker contrasts as those between the village on Belitung and the metropolis Jakarta; between the casual, self-made writer and the elegant literary figure; between the intuitive Andrea Hirata and the intellectual Laksmi Pamuntjak. While the man from the village focuses on achieving equal opportunities for all, the city dweller wants her compatriots to own up to the horrors of their history. They may not know each personally, but they appreciate one another and they will

both be ambassadors for Indonesia at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October, where the country will be showcased as this year's guest of honor.



Muhammad Fadli/ DER SPIEGEL

Another Indonesia writer who has received international attention in recent years is Laksmi Pamuntjak. She wrote a novel about a 1960s-era massacre of communists in Indonesia and will likewise be an ambassador at this year's Frankfurt Book Fair.

Jakarta is one of the biggest, dirtiest and most crowded cities in the world. It has 30 million inhabitants and slums that spill over into seemingly endless suburbs. In the center of town there is a "golden triangle" comprised almost exclusively of luxury hotels and expensive shopping malls. And then there's the climate: Most of the year it's humid and hot. The season for tropical storms and monsoons lasts for months. And because most of the roads are hopelessly congested, 10-kilometer (6-mile) traffic jams are a part of everyday life.

Indonesia has its Dutch colonialists to thank for the rise of its capital, which before independence in 1949 was no more than an administrative center located on a bay under constant threat of flooding. "Big Durian" is what the locals half-lovingly, half-derisively call the urban beast that is Jakarta, after the large and foul, yet sweet-smelling fruit.

There, in the south of Jakarta, in a neighborhood of villas and gardens, is where Laksmi Pamuntjak, 43, lives with her husband and daughter. She has an expressive face with sparkling eyes and long hair, and is wearing a black dress and high-heeled shoes. "I know that my origins have provided me every opportunity," she says, almost apologetically. Her grandparents owned a publishing house, her father was an architect and her mother studied pharmacology. Laksmi was sent to good schools and learned to play the piano. There was a time when she considered a career as a concert pianist.

But even as a youth she was aware of the dark side of Indonesian society. Above all, she was interested in the massacre of the Communists and leftist liberals from 1965-66. Hundreds of thousands of "enemies of the people" were executed or deported to camps following a failed coup against the military dictator Sukarno. It was one of the greatest, unpunished crimes of the 20th century, and it still resonates years later. Many people who were deemed "suspicious" are still suffering today. Pamuntjak watched as one of her favorite teachers, who was married to a former deportee, was forced to quit her job due to constant changes imposed upon her husband.

The Courage to Go Looking

Pamuntjak, inquisitive by nature, later studied in Perth, Australia and published books of poetry and essays. But Indonesia's repressed trauma never let her go. She began researching on her own for a novel that would center around the violence of 1965, visiting the remote island of Buru and meeting with former prisoners and jailers. It was an investigation against forgetting, an appeal against the silence that for so long had been enforced by the authorities.

She tells the story as a family saga, based on the Indian national epic poem "Mahabharata," in which the young student Amba falls in love with a doctor named Bhishma, who sympathizes with the far left. In the turmoil surrounding the hunt for any and all political opposition, Amba loses track of her kidnapped boyfriend. Only as an old woman does she have the courage to go looking for him and find clues about his fate.

"Amba" became a prize-winning bestseller in Indonesia even though the denunciation of the past is something that upsets many in the country. The book was published as "The Question of Red" in English, and will be released in German this autumn. It has a rather melancholic ending: "It is hard to say what breaks a person more easily: the sting of failure or the music of hope."

It wasn't just the military and police that took part in the pogroms 50 years ago. Islamic organizations, members of which marched through neighborhoods and pulled "traitors" from their homes, were involved too. But the author does not want to place sweeping blame on the Muslims. She considers herself religious. For her, there is always room for doubt -- an attitude she does not share with the Islamists. The murders at the *Charlie Hebdo* office earlier this year still occupy her thoughts today. "I find many of their caricatures offensive. We Muslims, however, must learn to stay calm. If we had more confidence in our own religion, we wouldn't have to react so hysterically."

Laksmi Pamuntjak reserves no sympathy for radicals. She sees the greatest danger not in religious fundamentalism, but in increasing social disparities.

The Asian island kingdom, with all its faults and setbacks, does set the right priorities. Its most important politicians and writers are connected by the knowledge that education is the only way to progress and religion is something private. Of Indonesia's 220 million Muslims, far fewer have left to join the Islamic State than in Tunisia or Saudi Arabia or, for that matter, Germany.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/indonesia-has-found-success-in-moderation-a-1047018.html>

Islam Nusantara can protect RI from fundamentalism

The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | National | Mon, August 24 2015, 2:51 PM

Analysts have argued that the concurrent promotion of moderate Islamic thinking by both Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, the country's two largest Muslim organizations, was a positive indication that Muslims in Indonesia are generally more wary of firebrand versions of Islam.

Muslim thinker Akhmad Sahal said that NU's promotion of *Islam Nusantara*, and Muhammadiyah's Islam Berkemajuan (progressive Islam), resulted from a long history of Islamic teachings being contextualized within local Indonesian culture.

Sahal said that *Islam Nusantara* showed the character of a progressive faith.

Islam Nusantara promotes the idea that values derived from religion can be made consistent with local context.

"We aren't practicing Islamic teachings or values as they are practiced in Saudi Arabia," said Sahal, who is also chairman of the US branch of NU.

Sahal, however, said that *Islam Nusantara* should not be considered as synonymous with other local traditions such as klenik (black magic) or Islam Kejawen (Islam tinged with Javanese mysticism).

"*Islam Nusantara* means we are focused on muamalah [social duties] and maslahat [the general good] that the community, in this case Indonesia, must strive for," he said.

Earlier this month, in its 33rd national congress in Jombang, East Java, NU promoted its agenda of "reinforcing *Islam Nusantara* for Indonesia and for international civilization".

NU said that the concept of *Islam Nusantara*, according to Imam, referred to the empirical and historical reality that Islam had been embedded in the culture, economy, politics and technology of the archipelago for a long time.

The idea of *Islam Nusantara* is to inculcate tolerance among Muslims amid the metastasizing influence of conservative and radical groups from Middle Eastern countries.

Meanwhile, Hajriyanto Y. Thohari, a member of Muhammadiyah's executive board, said that the organization's version of Islam, known as *Islam Berkemajuan*, resulted from the need to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

“K.H Ahmad Dahlan once said that while practicing Islamic values, Indonesian Muslims should act progressively and follow the dictates of the time,” Hajriyanto said, referring to the founding father of Muhammadiyah.

He said that to act progressively, Indonesian Muslims should champion reason and continue to promote education and knowledge.

Hajriyanto said that other than implementing progressive values, Muhammadiyah always tried to match its values with secular and nationalist ideas.

“We always integrate Islamic values with modernity and Indonesian values,” he said.

Retiring Muhammadiyah chairman Din Syamsuddin said *Islam Berkemajuan* was a vision of a modern and moderate Islam.

He said that *Islam Berkemajuan* was not specifically made by Muhammadiyah for Muslims in Indonesia alone, but for all people in the world, across all walks of life.

“This concept also deepens our tolerance for others by putting emphasis on Islam as a moderate religion,” Din said while addressing the congress earlier this month.

Many have applauded the moves taken by the two Muslim organizations in promoting a tolerant version of Islam, saying that Islamic discourse in the country was going in the right direction by supporting Indonesia’s democracy.

There have also been mounting calls for NU and Muhammadiyah to work together to promote Indonesia’s tolerant version of Islam around the world.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/24/islam-nusantara-can-protect-ri-fundamentalism.html>

New MUI chairman to embrace beleaguered minority groups

Haeril Halim, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Headlines | Fri, August 28 2015, 5:57 PM

The National Meeting of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in Surabaya, East Java on Thursday elected senior cleric Ma'ruf Amin as chairman of the organization for the 2015-2020 term, replacing outgoing leader Din Syamsuddin.

In the past, the MUI has often been criticized for discriminating against minority groups like the Ahmadiyah and Shiite Muslims.

Ma'ruf said that he was determined to change the image of the MUI from a bulwark of conservatism to a moderate institution.

He said that minority sects, especially Ahmadiyah and Shia Islam, which many in Indonesian Muslims deem "deviant" from mainstream Islam, would be embraced by the MUI under his watch.

"We will not tolerate any persecution [of minority religious groups in Indonesia]. The new MUI will try its best to prohibit and even to prevent [any form of persecution] from happening. The new MUI will campaign for religious harmony without any form of violence," Ma'ruf told *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday night, just hours after his election.

Earlier, the MUI had issued an edict confirming that Ahmadis were "deviant" because they believed that there was another prophet after Muhammad.

As for Shia Islam, some local branches of the MUI issued an edict condemning it as "heretic" for believing that the leadership of Islam should be held only by those from the bloodline of the Prophet Muhammad.

Ma'ruf said that although the MUI could not change its basic tenets regarding Ahmadiyah and Shia Islam, it could start to apply a softer stance in dealing with them in the future.

"The first thing we will do is inform them of the true teaching of Islam through good manners without any form of violence. We then will embrace them and live with them peacefully, because they claim to be a part of Islam. If we can live peacefully with non-Muslims, why can't we do that with people who claim to be part of Islam?" Ma'ruf said.

Din, who is also former chairman of the country's second largest Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, said the MUI under Ma'ruf should serve as an umbrella for all Islamic organizations in the country in order to solve the problems faced by the roughly 210 million Muslims living in Indonesia.

“We will also establish dialogue with other minority groups from other religions, not only from Islam, in order to build a harmonious religious life in Indonesia,” said Din, who was elected as head of the MUI advisory council.

However, Islamic political analyst Ahmad Fuad Fanani from the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) said that Ma’ruf could be seen as a traditional conservative.

Fuad said that Ma’ruf was known for his conservative views on Islamic theology especially on the issue of Ahmadiyah and Shia Islam, given his former position as the head of the MUI edict division.

“We don’t know whether he will continue to hold on to the same stance after his election. Probably he will tend to be more moderate after the election because we can see that the new board of leadership at the MUI is filled with people from various backgrounds,” Fuad said.

“We hope that the presence of Din Syamsuddin and Azyumardi Azra on the advisory board of the MUI could balance against the conservative elements in MUI,” Fuad said.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/28/new-mui-chairman-embrace-beleaguered-minority-groups.html>

Among the Believers

A century-old mass organization cultivates an adaptable Islam.

SEP 14, 2015, VOL. 21, NO. 01 • BY PAUL MARSHALL

Jombang, Indonesia

The 50-mile route from Surabaya airport to this East Java city was lined with tens of thousands of banners wishing peace and success to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim organization, as participants gathered in August for its latest five-year congress.



There were banners bearing greetings from Indonesia's president and vice president, from the national political parties, the provincial governor, and governors throughout the country. Officials of the towns and villages through which those arriving for the congress passed also expressed warm wishes. Not to be outdone, banks and investment houses displayed greetings, as did Honda and Toyota and media, telephone, milk, cigarette, and sundry other companies. Since NU, founded in 1926, has some 50 million members, politicians and corporations wanted their goodwill and support to be well publicized. And there were reciprocal

greetings from Muhammadiyah, the world's second-largest Muslim organization (with some 40 million members), which was holding its own congress in Mukassar at the same time.

NU's gathering was a great, sprawling, colorful, four-day business reminiscent of a state fair. There were thousands of delegates, and tens of thousands of visitors and observers, though only a handful from abroad. The official delegates often appeared drained and strained since there were major and acrimonious disputes over election procedures for the new leadership, and the last sessions of the day did not begin until 11 p.m. But ordinary NU members were happy and friendly. I was asked over 100 times to be part of group photos. There was plenty of music from a large soundstage and scattered local bands, as well as an exhibition of NU-related art, myriad food stalls, commercial booths, foot massage stations, and endless vendors offering T-shirts, Islamic fashion, hats, rocks, toys, jewelry, buttons, CDs, bedsheets, and more. My prize: a combination cigarette lighter and bottle opener embossed with the NU logo.

The stalls also included serious items. Some advertised NU's many magazines, its expansive and growing charitable and social work, its 22 universities, thousands of schools, and millions of students. There were wonderful book exhibits and sales, from children's books on Islam to dense

theological and philosophical works, including the epistemology and axiology of Islamic jurisprudence. I was particularly struck by a reprint of the 1922 work *Menolak Wahhabi* (Wahhabism Rejected), by Muhammad Faqih Maskumambang, one of NU's founders. NU has been struggling against Wahhabism, the repressive Islam of Saudi Arabia, for a century, trying to counteract its inroads into Indonesia, including by articulating and promoting an Islam at home in a plural society.

This fit the congress's theme of "Islam Nusantara," or "Islam of the Archipelago," the traditional Islam of the islands, since Indonesia—with over 15,000 islands, half of them inhabited (and one of which, Run, the British gave the Dutch in exchange for Manhattan)—is the world's largest archipelago. Islam Nusantara emphasizes that, unlike desert lands, Indonesia is a country and people of islands, coasts, travel, trade, and ports, whose towns have always incorporated people very different in language, race, and creed, and which has cultivated openness to others—and so has Islamic beliefs and cultures compatible with diversity.

But Islam Nusantara is not meant to be merely a specimen of interest to sociologists of religion, a serendipitous local phenomenon conditioned by the accidents of geography. I was invited to one of the preparatory meetings to talk with NU scholars about the theological roots of Islam Nusantara. One of the main themes was how Muslims had related to existing cultures and religions when Islam was introduced—and how they should relate to them.

NU scholars, and many others in Indonesia, are developing serious theological works seeking to understand, clarify, and expound this adaptable Islam for wider application in the Muslim world. One major goal is to counter extremism both abroad and in Indonesia—ISIS, of course, but also movements that have been active locally, such as the Islamic Defender's Front, Laskar Jihad, the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, and Hizb ut-Tahrir. NU's Islamic College in Jakarta runs a graduate program devoted to Islam Nusantara.

Its proponents sharply reject the charge of syncretism. Rather, they speak of enculturation—a critical appreciation of, and judicious incorporation of, existing practices—and the indigenization of Islam. NU chairman Said Aqil Siradj has called for Islam to be propagated by "respecting local cultures, not eradicating them." This manifests itself theoretically in Islamic works paralleling Christian discussions of common grace and natural law. It shows itself practically in the architecture of the older mosques in Indonesia, especially Java, home to over half the population of 250 million. Some mosques may be mistaken for Chinese temples, since several of the early apostles of Islam in Indonesia came from China, while most mirror traditional Javanese styles, with pyramidal roofs topped with ornate decoration but rarely with crescents. Minarets were traditionally rare: The call to prayer or fasting during Ramadan was announced with the beating of a huge drum, a *bedug*, which was used in traditional Javanese Gamelan music.

NU does not confine Islam Nusantara to debate and doctrine. In the weeks following the congress, in sweltering heat, thousands of uniformed men and women from NU's youth wing, Ansor, accompanied by bands, marched to the At-Taqwa Grand Mosque in Cirebon, West Java, a city with a history of militancy. Ansor's leader, Alfa Isnaeni, denounced the idea of an Indonesian caliphate and called on his members to promote Islam Nusantara throughout the country. Many more such rallies are planned.

In Indonesia, the congress was a major event. It opened with a speech by the country's president; each day it was the lead item on TV news and in national newspapers. But apart from the presence of diplomats at the opening and reporting by specialized academics, it mostly passed unnoticed in the West.

This is tragic, since a few days spent at the congress of the world's largest Muslim organization would reshape most Westerners' perception of Islam. While groups such as ISIS demand a many-sided, including military, response, long-term antidotes to growing Islamic extremism can only be found in organizations such as NU.

Historically, NU, like Indonesia, has rarely sought a bigger place on the Islamic or world stage. But now, with the nation's economy the largest in the Muslim world, and after eight successful democratic elections, both are reaching out, sponsoring reconciliation and educational programs in Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. There are even NU branches in the United States.

As we continue to struggle with bloody chaos in much of the Middle East, Indonesia, and especially Indonesian Islam, needs our careful attention.

Paul Marshall is senior fellow at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and visiting professor at Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University in Jakarta.

http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/among-believers_1024815.html



Indonesia provides a vision of a peaceful post-Islamofascist world

World View: A very large Muslim organisation in the world's most populous Muslim country says the time has come to fight back against Isis ideology

Peter Popham @peterpopham Friday 27 November 2015



Indonesian Muslims perform the 'tarawih' prayer marking the first eve of Islam's holy month Ramadan in Jakarta Getty

As the threat from Isis grows starker, the caliphate's intellectual underpinnings have become clear: the missionary efforts of Wahhabi preachers, fuelled by tens of billions of dollars of Saudi oil money, that have saturated the Muslim world in the past 40 years. This is the rigid, medieval version of Islam which decrees that infidels be killed and their womenfolk violated – that such behaviour is the devout Muslim's religious duty. Millions of Muslims, praying in the ugly mosques built with Saudi money, have absorbed this hate-ridden version of the religion with their mothers' milk. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his followers are piously putting it into practice, with the results that we see.

It is not only the Shia, the Christians and the Yazidis who are suffering in consequence; the Sufis of Afghanistan and Kashmir and the Muslims of northern India, whose religious practices are

intertwined with Hinduism, have been forced into silence. Great artists like the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the legendary qawwali singer of Pakistan, are condemned as un-Islamic by imams for whom all music is the Devil's work.

Against this background of atrocity and intolerance, a very large Muslim organisation in the world's most populous Muslim country this week declared that the time has come to fight back.

Nahdlatul Ulama, an Indonesian Muslim organisation, claims to have 50 million members, more than one in four of Indonesia's Muslims. This week it released a feature-length film, *The Divine Grace of East Indies Islam*, which, from a foundation of Sunni theological orthodoxy, challenges Isis head on. Against Isis footage of prisoners being marched to a river bank, shot in the head and dumped in the water, the soundtrack declares, "Many who memorise the Koran... love to condemn others as infidels while ignoring their own infidelity to God, their hearts and minds mired in filth."

"We are directly challenging the idea of Isis, which wants Islam to be uniform, meaning that if there is any other idea of Islam that is not following their ideas, those people are infidels who must be killed," Yahya Cholil, general secretary of the organisation's supreme council, told the New York Times. "We will show that is not the case with Islam."



Indonesian Muslims participate in Eid Al-Adha prayers at Sunda Kelapa Port

Like European countries with large Muslim populations, Indonesia has suffered its share of terrorism from the Islamofascists, most notoriously the Bali bombings of 2005 (180 dead) and 2015 (seven dead), which were aimed at foreign tourists. Non-Sunni Muslims and minority religions have also been targeted, with churches forced to close, Shia Muslims attacked, and Ahmadiyya Muslims, stigmatised as heretics, harassed and intimidated.

In the province of Aceh, where coastal areas were destroyed in the 2004 tsunami, with the loss of more than 230,000 lives, Saudi-style Islamism has taken root. Fundamentalists interpreted the tsunami as God's punishment for sinful behaviour, and the imposition of Sharia law followed, with corporal punishment for gambling and drinking alcohol and women obliged to wear headscarves in public and other repressive measures. But Aceh has always been exceptional: as the spot where

Islam arrived in South East Asia in the 15th century, it has always been the most religiously conservative part of the country.

The rest of the country continues to hold out against such policies. The main island of Java was a major centre of both Hinduism and Buddhism for more than a millennium before Islam swept all before it, and the Indonesians continue to take pride in the richness of their cultural heritage: the extraordinary ninth century Buddhist complex at Borobudur, near Yogyakarta, survives, despite bombs in the 1980s and recent threats by Isis to destroy it, and continues to stage performances of the Ramayana, the Hindu epic.

“Islam,” VS Naipaul wrote in 1981 in his book *Among the Believers*, “which had come only in the 15th century, was the formal faith. But the Hindu-Buddhist past, that had lasted for 1,400 years before that, survived in many ways – half erased, slightly mysterious, but still awesome, like Borobudur itself. And it was this past which gave Indonesians... the feeling of their uniqueness.”

The rich, even baffling diversity of Indonesia’s past is matched by the complexity of its present, and makes it more comfortable in a globalised world than countries like Saudi Arabia, glued to a one-dimensional tradition of zealotry. In 2009, on her maiden overseas trip as secretary of state, Hillary Clinton told her hosts: “As I travel around the world... I will be saying to people, if you want to know whether Islam, democracy, modernity and women’s rights can co-exist, go to Indonesia.” It has held fast to the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement, keeping out of exclusive alliances and maintaining good relations with countries as diverse as Russia, China and Japan, as well as the United States and Saudi Arabia.

It is no accident that Nahdlatul Ulama has come out fighting against Isis this week: the organisation was founded in 1926 in reaction to the spread of Wahhabism, and has defined itself in opposition to the fundamentalists ever since. The spiritual leader of the group, Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, said: “Highly vocal elements within the Muslim population... justify their harsh and often savage behaviour by claiming to act in accord with God’s commands.” They are, he said, “grievously mistaken.”

Can Muslims so far from Arabia have any influence on opinion in the religion’s heartland? They stand a better chance than the likes of Messrs Cameron and Hollande.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/indonesia-provides-a-vision-of-a-peaceful-post-islamofascist-world-a6752246.html>



How to Challenge ISIS Propaganda? Indonesia Shows the Way



Aakash Joshi

First Published: December 1, 2015, 4:52 am

There is a spectre haunting the world. The spectre of ISIS. And the ideological challenge to the so-called 'Islamic' State is coming from within Islam itself.

The US, Europe, Russia and Syria along with an assortment of Arab countries continue to bomb parts of Syria and Iraq in the hope of decimating the world's most dangerous terror organisation. Despite the efforts of the world's best armies, ISIS was able to carry out the devastating attacks in Paris.

The terror organisation has also been able to recruit Muslim youth, through effective use of the internet and social media as propaganda tools. Western attempts to combat their propaganda machinery have met with mixed results at best.

Now, a powerful ideological challenge is being posed to the ISIS by the Nahdlatul Ulama, a Muslim organisation from Indonesia. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, and it's fighting ISIS' horrifying interpretation of Islam.

A Religious Attack on Islamic Fundamentalism

Indian Muslim organisations have condemned the ISIS as un-Islamic and even issued fatwas against them. In Indonesia though, a different strategy is being tried out.



A Muslim boy looks on as he holds a placard at a rally organised by a Muslim charitable trust in Mumbai. (Photo: Reuters)

The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is an organisation of Muslims in Indonesia that has over 50 million members. According to a report in the *New York Times*, the Nahdlatul Ulama has released a 90 minute film, much of it using ISIS' own footage.

But the visuals are not used to glorify the Islamic State, but rather point out how it is intolerant, anti-Islamic and, not to put too fine a point on it, evil.

The spread of a shallow understanding of Islam renders this situation critical, as highly vocal elements within the Muslim population at large – extremist groups – justify their harsh and often savage behaviour by claiming to act in accord with God's commands, although they are grievously mistaken. According to the Sunni view of Islam, every aspect and expression of religion should be imbued with love and compassion, and foster the perfection of human nature.

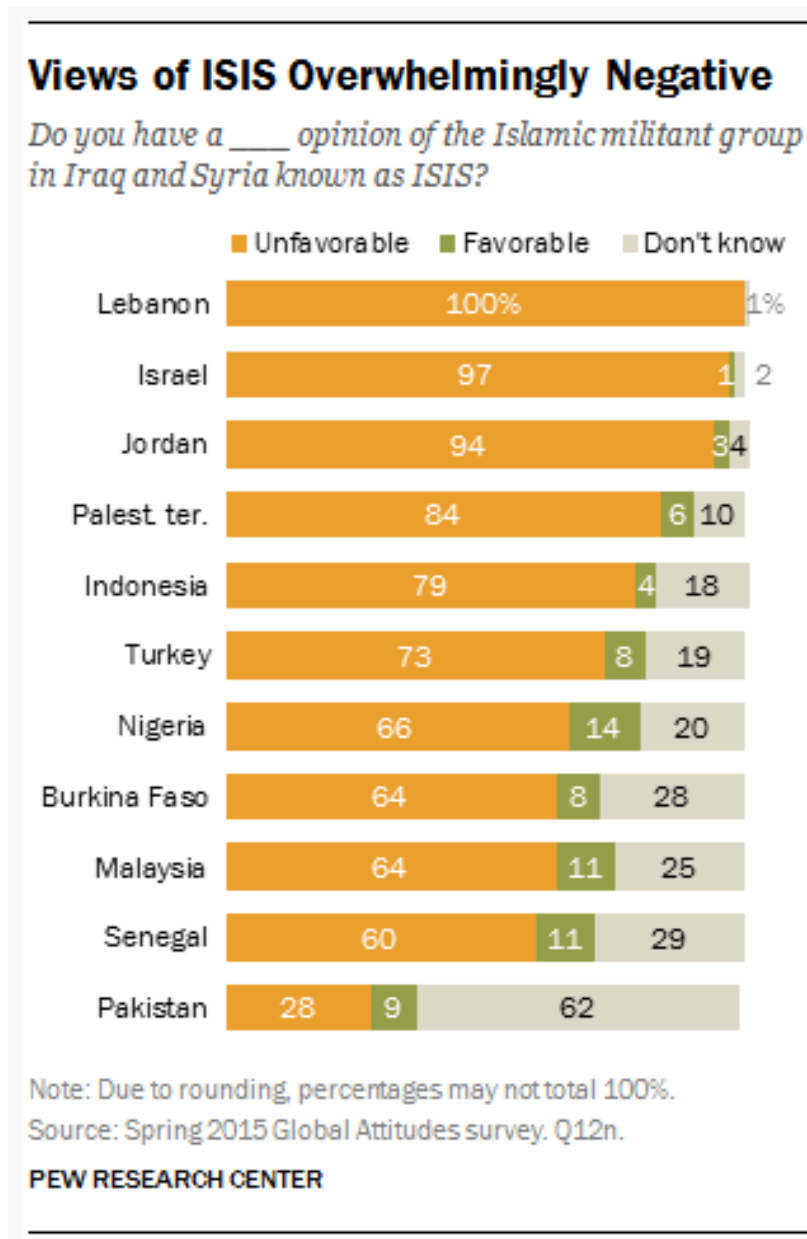
A Mustofa Bisri, Spiritual Head, Nahdlatul Ulama

The film is part of an ongoing campaign to combat ISIS and its potential to convert and corrupt the youth of the country. The NU stands for a tolerant, liberal Islam and is opposed to the fundamentalist interpretation of the Quran that both Wahabism and ISIS share. The question though, is whether their campaign will find resonance beyond Indonesia, where the group is most active.

ISIS Most Disliked in Muslim Countries

Movements and messages like those of NU, with a message of tolerance and brotherhood, may find resonance across countries with high Muslim populations. According to a survey published by Pew Research Centre, most people in 11 countries with high Muslim populations expressed an

active dislike for the ISIS. Pakistan was the only exception, where most people surveyed did not have an opinion.



With the general threat of extremism and fundamentalism growing, these numbers can be an encouraging sign. A part of the battle against ISIS has to be on the ideological front, and initiatives like those of the NU will go a long way in that fight.

http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/in-nations-with-significant-muslim-populations-much-disdain-for-isis/ft_15-11-17_isis_views/

World's Largest Islamic Organization Tells ISIS To Get Lost

A 50-million strong Sunni movement in Indonesia just launched a global anti-extremism campaign.



Krithika Varagur

Associate What's Working Editor, The Huffington Post



ADEK BERRY via Getty Images

Each time the Islamic State, al Qaeda or another terrorist group commits violence in the name of Islam, a familiar refrain arises: What's the Muslim world doing about it?

In fact, anti-extremism efforts abound in the global Muslim community: Muslim leaders and scholars have denounced the Islamic State group, the U.K.'s Muslim Youth League has declared "ideological holy war" against extremism, and YouTube has even tried to recruit American Muslims to counter extremist content.

And in Indonesia, home of the world's largest Muslim population, a massive anti-extremism movement is underway.

Nahdlatul Ulama, or NU, is the largest independent Islamic organization in the world, with 50 million members. Part Sunni religious body, part political party and part charity, it was founded nearly 90 years ago, in 1926, as a response to another Sunni movement, Wahhabism.

Wahhabism is the ultra-conservative reform movement based in Saudi Arabia that advocates for puritanical laws from the time of Islam's origins. It rejects the modern notion of "religion as a purely private activity" and the separation of church and state. The Islamic State is highly committed to Wahhabi principles, using its religious textbooks and embracing its hardline tradition of killing unbelievers.

NU's stated goal is to "to spread messages about a tolerant Islam in their respective countries to curb radicalism, extremism and terrorism," which, it claims, "often spring from a misinterpretation of Islamic teachings." It launched its global anti-extremism initiative in 2014.

Its work was recently magnified by the Paris terror attacks, which Indonesia's Vice President, Jusuf Kalla, who serves on the NU Advisory Board, condemned at a three-day conference last week in Malang, Indonesia. The conference was held by the International Conference of Islamic Scholars, another Indonesian anti-radicalism project that its Foreign Ministry started in 2002, in wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. Kalla said, "There is nothing religious about such attacks because Islam never justifies them."

NU is setting its sights globally. In December 2014, it created an American nonprofit called Bayt ar-Rahmah in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to serve as headquarters for its international activities. It is planning "an international conference and cultural event in Washington, D. C." in Spring 2016, NU General Secretary Yahya Cholil Staquf told the Huffington Post.

It is also building a "prevention center" in Indonesia to train Arabic-speaking students to combat jihadist rhetoric, alongside NU theologians. And it's has created a joint program with the University of Vienna in Austria called VORTEX, the Vienna Observatory for Applied Research on Radicalism and Extremism. The project, which is funded by the Ministry of Internal Security, works to "produce counter-narratives against radical ideas and propagate them globally," said Staquf. He said NU is also working on future projects with the Swedish and British governments.

There are domestic concerns about NU's global ambitions, since there's still a need to counter extremism within Indonesia itself. The country has faced a number of deadly terrorist attacks in recent years, including on its beach resorts and luxury hotels. But NU says its campaign applies "equally to local radicals," according to the New York Times. And NU suggests that the specific differences of Indonesian Islam, which it believes is more moderate and tolerant than that of the Middle East, should be both encouraged at home and propagated abroad. "When we learn that the threat of radicalism is global, we need to consolidate globally to challenge it," Staquf told HuffPost.

Indonesia is home to one of the most liberal Muslim populations in the world. On Nov. 14, the Indonesian Ulema Council, the country's top Muslim clerical body, which includes NU, announced a plan to mobilize 50,000 preachers to spread moderate, or "Wasathiyah," Islam within Indonesia.

As suggested in a 2012 article in the Indonesian policy journal Strategic Review, pluralism may be the "big idea" that Indonesian Islam can bring to the world stage. Although Indonesian Muslims are a numerical majority, they live alongside Hindus and Buddhists who predated them on the island, and they share and mix spiritual traditions. Indonesia's national motto is *bhinneka tunggal ika*, or "unity in diversity," and that ethos is central to the country's Muslim traditions. It's the backdrop for the school of Islam Nusantara, or "Islam of the Archipelago," a 500-year-old strain of Sunnism that emphasizes Hindu-Buddhist tenets like nonviolence and religious tolerance.

In a 90-minute film released by NU called "The Divine Grace of Islam Nusantara," Indonesian Islamic scholars systematically criticize and denounce the Islamic State's interpretations of the Quran and Hadith.

The film underscores the ambition and scope of NU's anti-extremism platform. "At the upstream level, it is the job of clerics to combat embryos of terrorism, while on the downstream side, it is the job of law enforcement institutions to do so," said Muzadi, who also serves as secretary-general of ICIS.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/indonesian-muslims-counter-isis_565c737ae4b072e9d1c26bda

World's Largest Islamic Organization Tells ISIS To Get Lost

A 50-million strong Sunni movement in Indonesia just launched a global anti-extremism campaign.

By The Huffington Post | December 4, 2015



Each time the Islamic State, al Qaeda or another terrorist group commits violence in the name of Islam, a familiar refrain arises: What's the Muslim world doing about it?

In fact, anti-extremism efforts abound in the global Muslim community: Muslim leaders and scholars have denounced the Islamic State group, the U.K.'s Muslim Youth League has declared "ideological holy war" against extremism, and YouTube has even tried to recruit American Muslims to counter extremist content.

And in Indonesia, home of the world's largest Muslim population, a massive anti-extremism movement is underway.

Nahdlatul Ulama, or NU, is the largest independent Islamic organization in the world, with 50 million members. Part Sunni religious body, part political party and part charity, it was founded nearly 90 years ago, in 1926, as a response to another Sunni movement, Wahabbism.

Wahhabism is the ultra-conservative reform movement based in Saudi Arabia that advocates for puritanical laws from the time of Islam's origins. It rejects the modern notion of "religion as a purely private activity" and the separation of church and state. The Islamic State is highly committed to Wahhabi principles, using its religious textbooks and embracing its hardline tradition of killing unbelievers.

NU's stated goal is to "to spread messages about a tolerant Islam in their respective countries to curb radicalism, extremism and terrorism," which, it claims, "often spring from a misinterpretation of Islamic teachings." It launched its global anti-extremism initiative in 2014.

Its work was recently magnified by the Paris terror attacks, which Indonesia's Vice President, Jusuf Kalla, who serves on the NU Advisory Board, condemned at a three-day conference last week in Malang, Indonesia. The conference was held by the International Conference of Islamic Scholars, another Indonesian anti-radicalism project that its Foreign Ministry started in 2002, in wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. Kalla said, "There is nothing religious about such attacks because Islam never justifies them."

NU is setting its sights globally. In December 2014, it created an American nonprofit called Bayt ar-Rahmah in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to serve as headquarters for its international activities. It is planning "an international conference and cultural event in Washington, D. C." in Spring 2016, NU General Secretary Yahya Cholil Staquf told the Huffington Post.

It is also building a "prevention center" in Indonesia to train Arabic-speaking students to combat jihadist rhetoric, alongside NU theologians. And it's has created a joint program with the University of Vienna in Austria called VORTEX, the Vienna Observatory for Applied Research on Radicalism and Extremism. The project, which is funded by the Ministry of Internal Security, works to "produce counter-narratives against radical ideas and propagate them globally," said Staquf. He said NU is also working on future projects with the Swedish and British governments.

There are domestic concerns about NU's global ambitions, since there's still a need to counter extremism within Indonesia itself. The country has faced a number of deadly terrorist attacks in recent years, including on its beach resorts and luxury hotels. But NU says its campaign applies "equally to local radicals," according to the New York Times. And NU suggests that the specific differences of Indonesian Islam, which it believes is more moderate and tolerant than that of the Middle East, should be both encouraged at home and propagated abroad. "When we learn that the threat of radicalism is global, we need to consolidate globally to challenge it," Staquf told HuffPost.

Indonesia is home to one of the most liberal Muslim populations in the world. On Nov. 14, the Indonesian Ulama Council, the country's top Muslim clerical body, which includes NU, announced a plan to mobilize 50,000 preachers to spread moderate, or "Wasathiyah," Islam within Indonesia.

As suggested in a 2012 article in the Indonesian policy journal Strategic Review, pluralism may be the "big idea" that Indonesian Islam can bring to the world stage. Although Indonesian Muslims are a numerical majority, they live alongside Hindus and Buddhists who predated them on the island, and they share and mix spiritual traditions. Indonesia's national motto is *bhinneka tunggal ika*, or

“unity in diversity,” and that ethos is central to the country’s Muslim traditions. It’s the backdrop for the school of Islam Nusantara, or “Islam of the Archipelago,” a 500-year-old strain of Sunnism that emphasizes Hindu-Buddhist tenets like nonviolence and religious tolerance.

In a 90-minute film released by NU called “The Divine Grace of Islam Nusantara,” Indonesian Islamic scholars systematically criticize and denounce the Islamic State’s interpretations of the Quran and Hadith.

The film underscores the ambition and scope of NU’s anti-extremism platform. “At the upstream level, it is the job of clerics to combat embryos of terrorism, while on the downstream side, it is the job of law enforcement institutions to do so,” said Muzadi, who also serves as secretary-general of ICIS.

<http://www.mintpressnews.com/worlds-largest-islamic-organization-tells-isis-to-get-lost/211809/>



(**ANTIMEDIA**) Though over one billion people in the world subscribe to the faith of Islam, every time a Muslim individual commits a violent and highly-publicized attack in the West, Americans demand unequivocal apologies and condemnations from all adherents to the religion. They cannot be bothered, of course, with the [exact, same terroristic slaughter](#) of non-whites in far-off lands.

Over and over, Islamic groups around the world [condemn terrorist attacks](#) and reiterate that violent radicals do not truly adhere to the religion. Even so, this never seems to be enough for the Fox News-inclined, who often falsely claim Muslims remain silent because they are uncivilized, violent savages. They insist 'good' Muslims must do more to combat extremism.

Such rhetoric, however, is increasingly, conspicuously false. One of the biggest blows to this mentality comes from Indonesia, where the largest independent Islamic organization in the world not only condemns acts of radical Islam, but has [launched a massive, worldwide initiative](#) to counter the ideology that breeds it.

[Nahdlatul Ulama](#), or NU, was founded in 1926, and boasts 50 million members. As Huffington Post [explained](#), it is "part Sunni religious body, part political party and part charity." NU says its goal is "to spread messages about a tolerant Islam in their respective countries to curb radicalism, extremism and terrorism," which the organization argues "often spring from a misinterpretation of Islamic teachings." To do so, the group launched a global anti-extremism campaign last year.

In December of 2014, NU began building a center in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to serve as its headquarters for the international project. NU is also planning "an international conference and cultural event in Washington, D.C.," scheduled for Spring 2016, according to NU General Secretary, Yahya Cholil Staquf.

Further, NU has [collaborated](#) with the University of Vienna to create the Vienna Observatory for Applied Research on Radicalism and Extremism (VORTEX). Staquf says the aim of this project is to "produce counter-narratives against radical ideas and propagate them globally." NU is also working on initiatives with the Swedish and British governments.

NU condemned last month's attacks in Paris, and only weeks afterward, **participated** in the International Conference of Islamic Scholars' annual forum on the *"importance of promoting a peaceful Islam to combat radicalism worldwide."*

The group also believes its efforts should apply *"equally to local radicals"* in Indonesia.

Indonesia is home to one of the most liberal Muslim populations in the world, and its constitution provides for freedom of religion. Though the government recognizes only **six religions** (and/or denominations) — Islam, Protestantism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Catholicism, and Buddhism — **religious minorities live in general harmony.**

Even so, **88% of Indonesia's population is Muslim** — and **sectarian conflicts persist.**

Terrorist attacks in Indonesia have increased in recent years, and multiple groups have moved to tackle the problem. The country's leading clerical body, the Indonesian Ulema Council, which includes groups like NU, recently **launched an initiative** to *"mobilize 50,000 preachers to spread moderate, or 'Wasathiyah,' Islam within Indonesia."* It has also launched a training center in the country to teach Arabic-speaking students how to counter extremist rhetoric and ideology.

Domestically and globally, NU is taking a proactive approach to curbing the proliferation of Islamic extremism. What is most relevant about its goals, however, is its condemnation of Wahhabism, a sect of Islam with roots in Saudi Arabia. Like NU, Wahhabism is derived from the Sunni sect of Islam, but their approaches could not be more different. As Huffington Post **summarized:**

*"Wahhabism is the **ultra-conservative reform movement** based in Saudi Arabia that advocates for puritanical laws from the time of Islam's origins. It rejects the modern notion of **'religion as a purely private activity'** and the separation of church and state. The Islamic State is highly committed to Wahhabi principles, **using its religious textbooks** and embracing its hardline tradition of killing unbelievers."*

Because of Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia has been **directly linked to the Islamic State**, though the United States has failed to highlight this relationship, much less acknowledge the **many human rights abuses** its monarchical ally commits. In fact, NU was aware of the dangers of Wahhabism when the organization launched, inspired by a **direct intention to counter the Saudi-linked ideology.**

In light of these facts, the Western response to radical Islam seems woefully insufficient. While NU evidently seeks to strike at the root of the world's most radical Islamic beliefs, the United States and its Western allies align themselves with the very purveyor of, and inspiration for, ISIS. High-level officials have **argued that the U.S. military directly contributed** to the rise of the terror group — but all the while, Western populations condemn Muslims for 'not doing enough' to counter this ideology.

NU's actions run in direct conflict with this repeatedly disproved notion. The organization's spiritual leader, A. Mustofa Bisri, has **said**, *"The spread of a shallow understanding of Islam renders this situation critical, as highly vocal elements within the Muslim population at large — extremist groups — justify their harsh and often savage behavior by claiming to act in accord with God's commands, although they are grievously mistaken."*

"According to the Sunni view of Islam," he added, *"every aspect and expression of religion should be imbued with love and compassion, and foster the perfection of human nature."*

<http://theantimedia.org/the-worlds-largest-muslim-group-has-been-opposing-radical-islam-for-90-years/>

Indonesia's largest Muslim group joins battle against radical Islam

Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), has joined the global battle against radical ideology, producing a documentary film to draw the line between moderate and radical Islam.

By Sujadi Siswo Posted 10 Dec 2015 19:38 Updated 10 Dec 2015 21:26



JAKARTA: Never in its 90-year history has the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) come out so forcefully to explain the brand of Islam it propagates in Indonesia.

In its 90-minute documentary film *The Divine Grace of Islam Nusantara*, NU explains how Islam has spread in the archipelago through local wisdom and culture.

And the teachings of the nine saints in mainland Java - popularly known as Wali Songo - is at the heart of this Islamic tradition that promotes peace and tolerance.

NU wants to promote this practice here, as radicalism takes root.

"Our primary target is our common Muslim people, because we know they need a bright line. They need this bright line that separates radical Islam from the true Islam," said Yahya Cholil Staqf, NU secretary general. "What we need is a consensus among the societies - societal consensus - that can marginalise those radical ideologies."

Several global organisations who supported the film's production have pooled their resources to counter the extremism being spread through popular media.



“This film was created to use technology in order to function as a loudspeaker and to easily propagate the traditional teachings of Islam that is a characteristic of not only Nusantara, or Indonesian Islam, but also the characteristics of the vast majority of Muslim population throughout the world,” said C Holland Taylor, chairman and CEO of LibForAll Foundation.

“Other organisations must also start to engage this ideological battle,” said Noor Huda Ismail, director of the Institute for International Peace-building. “Since 2002, we’ve seen a silent majority. We let the fringe minority of Muslim radicals grab the microphone and dictate the discourse.”

2002 was the year the Bali bombings shook Indonesia, and the country realised it was home to regional terror network Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

Jemaah Islamiyah has been decimated structurally, but its teachings and spirit are far from dead. While the JI was more of a regional phenomenon, Indonesia is now dealing with the threat and global appeal of Islamic State.

By latest estimates, 700 Indonesians have joined IS in Syria and Iraq - the largest contingent of foreign fighters from Asia. What is more worrying is that more than 160 of them are back in Indonesia.

As the face of moderate Islam in Indonesia, NU wants a bigger part in the ideological battle.

“Nahdlatul Ulama has already set in motion to build a cooperation with the University of Vienna in Austria to produce counter-narratives to radical Islamic ideologies,” said Yahya Cholil Staqif.

Home to the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia can play an important role for moderate Muslims looking for good role models, as they fight the spread of radical ideas.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesia-s-largest/2336104.html>

The Boston Globe

EDITORIAL

Moderate Muslims reclaim their faith

By The Editorial Board DECEMBER 11, 2015

HILLARY CLINTON takes political correctness too far when she [refuses](#) to characterize the fight against terrorism as a battle to defeat “radical Islam.” To use that term, she has argued, “sounds like we are declaring war against a religion.”

Such linguistic sensitivity may be well intentioned — especially given Donald Trump’s grotesque call to bar Muslims from entering the United States. But it does a disservice to the tens of millions of moderate, peaceful Muslims who abhor the extremism and violence of radical Islamists, and who want to highlight, not downplay, their rejection of the jihadists.

“If we’re to succeed in defeating terrorism, we must enlist Muslim communities as some of our strongest allies,” [President Obama rightly stressed](#) in his Oval Office address Sunday night. “That does not mean denying the fact that an extremist ideology has spread within some Muslim communities. It’s a real problem that Muslims must confront without excuse.”

Many Muslims would enthusiastically agree. Among them is the newly formed [Muslim Reform Movement](#), launched this month by a coalition of moderate Muslims from Canada, Europe, and the United States. In a public manifesto, the coalition put the stakes bluntly: “We are in a battle for the soul of Islam, and an Islamic renewal must defeat the ideology of Islamism.” It explicitly condemned violent jihad, embraced equal rights for women and religious minorities, and insisted on separation of mosque and state. “We are loyal to the nations in which we live,” the reform declaration stated. “We reject the idea of the Islamic state. . . . We oppose institutionalized sharia.”

To underscore their opposition to Wahhabism, the harsh and puritanical version of Islam promoted by Saudi Arabia, members of the reform coalition [posted a copy of their manifesto](#), Martin Luther-like, to the door of the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C., a mosque funded in part by the Saudi government.

Halfway around the globe, meanwhile, another organization of Muslim moderates is mounting a vigorous challenge to ISIS and jihadi extremism.

In Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim group has embarked on an international effort to repudiate the jihadist teachings and ideology of the Islamic State. The group is Nahdlatul Ulama, or NU, a 90-year-old Sunni social organization with [50 million members](#) and a reputation for progressive pluralism. It recently kicked off a new anti-extremist campaign, a multipronged ideological drive, [as The New York Times reported](#), to be “carried out online, and in hotel conference rooms and convention centers from North America to Europe to Asia.”

Last month, NU released a 90-minute film that vigorously refutes ISIS and its Wahhabist-rooted fundamentalism. The grisly massacres celebrated in so many jihadist videos are denounced in this film as an appalling perversion of Islam that the Muslim world must not tolerate. NU is also

training Arabic-speaking students, both male and female, to disseminate its antiradical values and challenge Islamist supremacism.

It is a great mistake to blame the evils committed by jihadi extremists on the Muslim religion. Radical Islam — not Islam itself — is the menace that must be defeated. Ultimately, that defeat can only be administered by Muslims passionately committed to moderation and tolerance. Those moderate Muslims need all the support we can give them as they battle for the soul of their faith.

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/editorials/2015/12/11/moderate-muslims-reclaim-their-faith/bneOHxssdBBIozElmbOS8J/story.html>

Nahdlatul Ulama: Indonesia's antidote to Islamism's feral fringe

THE AUSTRALIAN DECEMBER 12, 2015 12:00AM



Peter Alford

Correspondent

Jakarta

Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest independent Muslim organisation, is exporting Indonesia's traditionally tolerant Islamic values as the religion's authentic form, an antidote to nihilistic radicalism tearing apart the Middle East.

Claiming more than 40 million followers in the world's biggest Muslim nation, NU spiritual leaders are also trying to supplant the influence of Saudi-sponsored Wahhabism, which they believe is the ideological wellspring of Islamic State.

The message to vulnerable Muslim communities everywhere is "NU is here to help", Supreme Council secretary-general Yahya Cholil Staquf told *The Weekend Australian*.

"We know this threat, we have been fighting it for almost 90 years — it's our daily business to face them," said Haji Yahya.

"We know how they think, we know who they are, we know how they operate."

NU has this week launched *Rahmat Islam Nusantara* (The Divine Grace of East Indies Islam), a video explaining Indonesian Islam's origins and theology, fiercely rebutting Islamic State and Wahhabi fundamentalism.

NU formed in 1926 in part to resist the spread of Wahhabism to what was then the Dutch East Indies, following the Saudis' conquest of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

The new video denounces Saudi Islam as "grasping and materialistic, coarse and cruel" and links Wahhabist persecution of non-conforming Muslims and destruction of ancient shrines and sacred graves to Islamic State's depredations.

"Perhaps we have not witnessed with our own eyes our friends and neighbours being slaughtered," says NU chairman Said Aqil Siradj amid images of horrific executions and mosque destruction.

"We have not witnessed with our own eyes the graves of our saints and our religious scholars being desecrated and destroyed by these people. But it's obvious, obvious they are working non-stop to reach us."

NU, an organisation that has seen itself defending Indonesian religious values from aberrant foreign doctrines, is now joining the international ideological struggle.

Its message is directed both at the faithful abroad and non-Muslims horrified particularly by Islamic State.

“It is very important we export the ideas of Islam Nusantara to the world, in these times when many in the world hate Islam because of the acts of some Islamic people,” Dr Said said at the launch.

But as NU also struggles ideologically with extremists at home, some surreptitiously resourced from the Arabian Peninsula, others openly supporting Islamic State or al-Qa’ida, the video also reiterates Islam Nusantara’s traditions of pluralism and tolerance.

Indonesia’s senior security minister Luhut Panjaitan this week said the government was working with NU, Muhammadiyah, the other mass Sunni Muslim organisation, and other religious groups on a program of “soft approach to the problem of radicalisation”.

But NU leaders worry the government itself has been reluctant to confront radical groups, particularly those pushing as their main line imposition of sharia law across the nation, which NU opposes.

The thuggish Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), which enjoys close relations with some senior police, bullies non-Sunni communities — Shia and Ahmadiyya — and Christian churches, against NU’s precepts.

NU leaders believe the upsurge in attacks on Shias and Ahmaddis in the past five years is directly related to the spread of Wahhabi influence in Indonesia.

The former regional terrorist organisation Jemaah Islamiah remains legal in Indonesia and is energetically recruiting among young middle-class people in the cause of sharia law.

The government itself has yet to give legal teeth to its 2014 “ban” on Islamic State, so that recruitment and travelling to Syria to fight for the caliphate still are not illegal.

Radical agendas prevailed at a Congress of Indonesian Muslims in February when NU, Muhammadiyah and the organiser Indonesian Ulama Council were pushed to the margins by the likes of FPI, Hizbut Tahrir and Indonesian Mujahadin Council.

Rahmat Islam Nusantara throughout emphasises and reinforces the tradition of Walisongo, the Nine Saints who began proselytising Islam in Java in the early 15th century.

That is a tradition of peaceful conversion, co-option of local cultures and the strong element of Sufi mysticism, all anathema to Saudi Islam and radical variants such as Islamic State.

“We are encouraging Muslim communities all over the world that they have the right to be Muslims, while at the same time maintaining their own local cultures and civilisation,” said Haji Yahya.

The video is being distributed internationally as *The Divine Grace of Islam Nusantara*, including an Arab-language subtitled version, over the internet and social media.



ISIS in the World's Largest Muslim Country

Why are so few Indonesians joining the Islamic State?

EDWARD DELMAN | JAN 3, 2016 | GLOBAL

In recent days, rumblings of ISIS have reached the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. Security forces in Indonesia, which is home to some 200 million Muslims, [launched](#) a manhunt for the militant leader Santoso, who had publicly pledged loyalty to the Islamic State. Police [arrested](#) several suspected ISIS supporters amid chatter about terror plots, while Australia's attorney-general [warned](#) that the Islamic State was intent on establishing a "distant caliphate" in the Southeast Asian island nation. But the flurry of activity doesn't tell the whole story about ISIS's inroads in Indonesia. Consider, for example, that while the number of foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and other violent extremist groups [is estimated](#) to have more than doubled between June 2014 and December 2015, relatively few are coming from Indonesia—at least for now. The question is: Why?

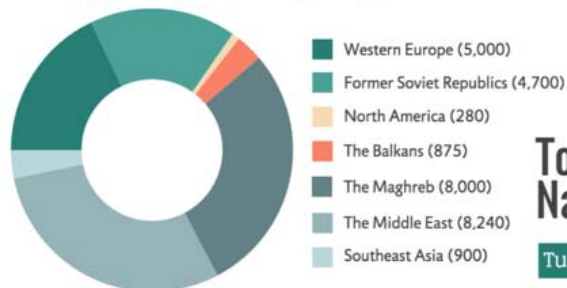
Indonesia has certainly experienced its share of terrorism and jihadist movements since declaring independence from the Netherlands in 1945. After proclaiming an "Islamic state" in 1949, the organization [Darul Islam](#) denounced the Indonesian state as apostate and staged a series of armed rebellions against it in the 1950s and early 1960s, before moving underground. The militant Islamist movement then split into numerous groups, from [Laskar Jihad](#), which led an anti-Christian

campaign across Indonesia, to [Jemaah Islamiyah](#), which executed the [2002 Bali bombings](#). Indonesian jihadists have not solely focused on local targets; [many](#) went to Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion as mujahideen, though most [only received training](#) rather than engaging directly in the fighting there.

Moreover, there is clearly a base of support for ISIS in Indonesia. A September 2014 [report](#) by the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) details the Islamic State’s aggressive recruitment and propaganda efforts in the country, as well as mass professions of allegiance to the group. (As the report and a more recent one from [USAID](#) caution, these public declarations—in which roughly 1,000 to 2,000 people have taken part—are not necessarily accurate measures of active support for ISIS.) IPAC notes in [another report](#) that “the conflict in Syria has captured the imagination of Indonesian extremists in a way no foreign war has before,” for reasons ranging from the suffering of Sunni Muslims there, to the prospect of restoring an Islamic caliphate, to the fact that “Syria is directly linked to predictions in Islamic eschatology that the final battle at the end of time will take place in Sham, the region sometimes called Greater Syria or the Levant, encompassing Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel.”

Whatever the extent of ISIS’s support in Indonesia, that support has not translated into Indonesians heeding the call of jihad and heading to the Middle East in large numbers. A recent [Soufan Group report](#) on foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria (not necessarily fighting with ISIS) cited an Indonesian-government estimate that 700 of those fighters hailed from Indonesia as of July 2015—a number that the group says is probably an *overestimate*. In comparison, the official estimate for France is 1,700; for Russia, 2,400; for the United States, 150; and for Tunisia, 6,000. In France, 18 people per million Muslim citizens [are thought to be fighting](#) in Syria and Iraq, according to the USAID study. In Tunisia, that number is 280. In Indonesia, it’s just over one.

Foreign Fighters by Region



Top Foreign Fighter Nationalities



The Soufan Group

Why are so few Indonesians traveling to Syria to fight? The statistics in Indonesia do conform to a degree with those of nearby countries. Official estimates indicate that only 100 foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria are arriving from Muslim-majority Malaysia, and that a minuscule 23 are coming from India, whose population includes [177 million Muslims](#). But explaining the phenomenon as a regional trend glosses over country-specific dynamics. ISIS may have gained less traction in

Malaysia than in the Arab world or Western Europe, but Malaysia still has [over six times the rate](#) of Muslim citizens leaving for battle in the Middle East as Indonesia has. Polls [also suggest](#) that a higher percentage of Malaysians than Indonesians are sympathetic to ISIS and the tactic of suicide bombings, though in both cases that support is confined to a small minority of the population. In India, much of Muslim civil society has repudiated ISIS and other Islamic terrorist organizations, with nearly [70,000 clerics](#) signing an anti-ISIS fatwa.

In November, *The New York Times* [pointed to](#) one factor behind the muted response to ISIS in Indonesia: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), an Islamic organization that claims to have 50 million members. NU preaches an Islam of compassion, inclusivity, and tolerance of other faiths, as opposed to ISIS's fundamentalist, Wahhabi-inspired theology. "We are directly challenging the idea of ISIS, which wants Islam to be uniform, meaning that if there is any other idea of Islam that is not following their ideas, those people are infidels who must be killed," Yahya Cholil Staquf, the general secretary to the NU supreme council, told the *Times*.

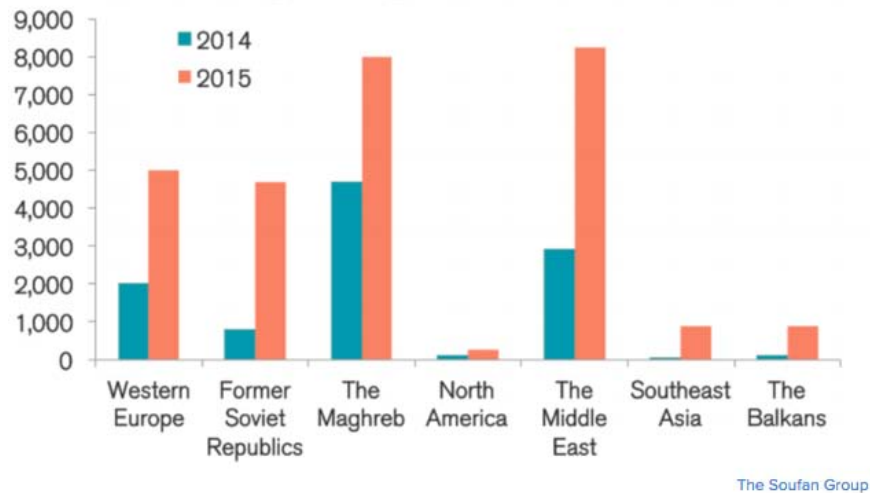
Sidney Jones, the director of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, agreed that NU has played a role in minimizing ISIS's appeal to Indonesians. "That movement is indeed a bulwark against more people being attracted by extremist ideologies," Jones told me. However, "the people that are getting recruited into ranks such as ISIS and other jihadi groups before that are not coming from Nahdlatul Ulama," so the organization's impact may be more limited than its size suggests.

Instead, Jones mentioned several other causes: "Indonesia is a country that doesn't have a repressive government, is not under occupation, it's politically stable, so there's no social unrest or conflict, and the Muslims aren't a persecuted minority. So when you put all of those factors together, it's not all that surprising that it's actually only a tiny minority of even the activist population that's leaving for Syria."

"Indonesia doesn't have a repressive government, is not under occupation, it's politically stable, and the Muslims aren't a persecuted minority."

Indeed, the countries that send the largest numbers of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq, either in absolute terms or on a per-capita basis, tend to be either politically repressive (Saudi Arabia, 2,500 fighters), politically unstable (Tunisia, 6,000 fighters), discriminatory toward a Muslim minority (Russia, 2,400 fighters), or a combination of the above. As further evidence for her point, Jones cited the tumultuous period immediately following the collapse in 1998 of the authoritarian Suharto government, which had ruled Indonesia for more than three decades. The resulting instability provided "the best recruitment tool radical groups ever had. They've never been able to get back to that level of attraction of joining a jihadi movement, because there's not a local driver" for radicalization in the young democracy, she explained.

Foreign Fighter Growth



Jones added that Indonesia’s freedom of expression creates space within which radical communities can advocate for Islamic law and an Islamic state without feeling the need to resort to violent action in pursuit of those goals. While acknowledging that certain groups have taken advantage of that space, Jones said that “it does keep the numbers of violent extremists” to a “manageable” level.

Meanwhile, according to IPAC, “ISIS has triggered a bigger backlash than ever seen before in the Indonesian Muslim community, suggesting that support will stay limited to a fringe of the radical fringe.” And that backlash isn’t just coming from NU; other mainstream Muslim organizations, including a coalition known as the Brotherhood Forum of the Indonesian Council of Religious Scholars, have rejected ISIS’s ideology. Nor has ISIS received the warmest of welcomes from Indonesia’s jihadist communities. The Islamic State’s brutality and decision to proclaim a caliphate have drawn criticism from jihadist media outlets and radical clerics in the country; “most of the hardline Muslim community have distanced themselves from ISIS or have taken a wait-and-see stance,” IPAC notes, including Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, which has declared ISIS a “deviant” movement. When asked about the possible impact of deradicalization programs by the Indonesian government, Jones responded, “I think it’s the good sense of the Muslim majority rather than government programs that are keeping the numbers down.”

But that “good sense,” it seems, is shaped at least in part by a stable, representative political system that respects its Muslim constituents—and a Muslim population that, even in some of its radical corners, loudly rejects ISIS’s practices and narrative. Which raises a question: Can lessons from countries like Indonesia somehow be applied to repressive and volatile countries in the Middle East, or to marginalized Muslim communities in Europe? ISIS’s ability to continue attracting recruits may hinge on the answer.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/isis-indonesia-foreign-fighters/422403/>



Daesh, Islam Nusantara and shades of grey

KEITH LOVEARD, GUEST CONTRIBUTOR – 14 JANUARY 2016



It's an old enemy of Wahhabism. But is Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama and its project of tolerant, peaceful Islam an antidote to the extremism of Islamic State?

A statement late last year by Islamic State's spokesman and senior leader, Sheikh Abu Muhammad Al Adnani, drew attention mainly because of his orders to attack "unbelievers" in the West.

It was widely assumed that these unbelievers were non-Muslims, like those killed in the Paris attacks. But Adnani was also telling Muslims that they too may be judged unbelievers, and suffer the consequences.

He urged Muslims to attack unbelievers in any way they could.

If you refuse to do this, while our brothers are being bombarded and killed, and while their blood and their possessions are destroyed everywhere, then review your religion. Then you are in a dangerous situation.

Islamic State is playing on an old Islamic theme. If a caliphate exists, Muslims must defend it. If they fail to do so, they will be considered apostates.

There are no greys in the Islamic State religious scheme, notes Holland Taylor, head of non-profit LibForAll, which fights for tolerant Islam. Islamic State, like so many other religious groups over the centuries, believes it is the only way to God. Anyone who does not believe that may be killed or enslaved, sold as chattel.

As many have already noted, Daesh, as many Muslims prefer to call Islamic State, is a death cult attempting to put the world into reverse and turn it into a medieval construct ruled entirely by its leaders' strict interpretation of shariah law. The acronym Daesh happens to sound like Dahes, Arabic for sowing discord. Small wonder that Islamic State will cut your tongue out for using the term.

The emergence of Daesh is a problem for Muslims, for whom it is doctrinally impossible to deny sharia, or *fiqh*, the law. To deny Islamic State is, at least in the eyes of the radicals, to deny Islam. Many Muslims who know very little of their faith are easily cowed into submission by the threat of apostasy.

But while Daesh has wreaked havoc in the Middle East, many Indonesian Muslims are determined to oppose its demands.

Entering the lift at the central headquarters of traditionalist Sunni movement Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Jakarta, I and the other passengers are greeted by a recorded voice: "*Salam Alaikum*" (Welcome). When we stop at a floor, the recorded voice says "*Alhamdulillah*" (thanks to God). There are a few titters from the passengers, who perhaps like me are reminded of an evangelical prayer group in the West.

Indonesia, and even cosmopolitan Jakarta, adheres increasingly to the formalities of Muslim life.

Muslim modes of fashion and public behavior have become far more entrenched in daily life. NU, among all the changes of modern life, stoutly defends its traditional style of Islam. The world's largest single organisation of any kind with an estimated 50 million members, it represents a traditional, Indonesian-flavored Islamic community that says the barbarians of Daesh have got it all wrong.

The lift reaches the seventh floor, and we arrive at the Aula, the hall, where I grab a seat in the second row. The hall fills up quickly, the audience including a number of acquaintances, some foreign journalists, another Indonesia-watcher, a finance man. I ask the latter why he's come to the screening of the NU film. "I'm French. After Paris this is important to me," he states. It's important to all of us, I respond.

The speakers arrive. Kyai Haji Said Aqil Sirodj, the general secretary of the central board of Nahdlatul Ulama, tells us why we're here.

The aim of the film is to export to the whole world. Donald Trump wants to ban all Muslims from entering America because of the actions of a small group of people who are conducting terror in the name of Islam. Islam Nusantara is not anti-Arab but it is an Islam that developed in the eastern islands and it is very different to the Islam of the Middle East.

Siradj and his allies at NU are promoting their unique form of Islam as an antidote to Islamic State, a rejection of Wahhabism, an alternative model for Muslims everywhere as a comfortable fit of religion and culture, and as a message to the West that not all Muslims are crazed murderers.

Islam Nusantara, says Said Aqil, was introduced to the Indonesian islands in 1470, nearly 300 years before Ibn Abd al-Wahhab formed an alliance with a local ruler, Muhammad Ibn Saud, in what many believe has now become an unholy alliance of religious fanaticism and oil wealth.

We settle down to watch the documentary, *The Divine Grace of Islam Nusantara*. It's a one-and-a-half hour movie, slickly produced that carries the argument of the local brand of the religion as a remedy to Islamic State. The theme of the movie is a festival held in 2014 to honour the last resting places of the *Walisongo* (Nine Saints).

While there is debate among historians about how Islam arrived in the islands, NU credits Maulana Malik Ibrahim with the honour. Considered the first of the *Walisongo*, the others were his descendants. While some say they were of Arab descent, NU itself states that they were Chinese mystics. The second *Walisongo*, Sunan Ampel, is believed to have been born in Champa, modern-day Vietnam.

The tombs of the *Walisongo*, scattered around the north coast of Java, are pilgrim sites to this day. At just one, the custodian says that on an average day around 15,000 people visit. In Saudi Arabia, sites such as this have been erased from the earth by the purist Wahhabi in a sterilised form of state Islam that Said Aqil states is also intrinsically capitalist.

Mysticism

The presence of the *Walisongo* in Java did not result in conflict with established religions. The courts followed Hinduism and Buddhism but most people, according to historian and religious school operator KH Agus Sanyoto, followed a belief system called Kapitayan. Instead of rejecting this creed, the *Walisongo* adopted it into what became Islam Nusantara – Islam with the flavor of the East Indies archipelago.

“The Kapitayan worshiped the highest God, who they called Sang Hyang Taya, the Great Void or Absolute,” Sanyoto recounts in the film. “Taya means emptiness, yet although the word literally means ‘that which is not’ it does not imply non-existence.

“This cannot be explained in purely rational terms, which is why Sang Hyang Taya came to be described with the phrase Tan Keno Kinoyo Ngopo, ‘that to which nothing can be done’. The mind cannot grasp ‘That’ which lies beyond human concepts, nor can ‘That’ be approached using any of the five senses.”

Followers of Sang Hyang Taya venerate rocks and boulders, which they see as containing the essence of the absolute. Priests meditated to caves, which represented emptiness. The Dutch described the belief system as animist, and Daesh and the Wahhabi consider it – and Islam Nusantara with it – as apostasy.

Old enemies

For NU, the propagation of Islam Nusantara as a counter to Daesh is not merely a question of theology. The organisation was formed specifically to counter pressure from Wahhabi infiltration. “We know who these people are, we have been fighting them for 90 years,” says KH Yahya Cholil Staquf, one of the leaders of the Islam Nusantara project.

KH Mustofa Bisri, until recently the spiritual head or Rois Aam of NU, describes the proselytising of the Wahhabi as an offence to the Prophet Muhammad. “The Prophet advised those who

proselytise (*da'wa*) to make things easy for people, not cause them to live in terror. And yet lately it is precisely *da'wa* that makes people feel horrified and appalled by Islam.

“Genuine Islam, Islam Nusantara, Indonesian Islam, the Islam taught by the Messenger of God, has been supplanted by Saudi Islam, a grasping and materialistic Islam, coarse, cruel and savage. The Wahhabi view is just a ghoulish nightmare that keeps the world awake at night, trembling in horror.”

The enmity between Indonesian Islam and Wahhabism has deep roots.

Pilgrims from West Sumatra who returned from the haj in the early 1800s determined that their indigenous Islam, coloured with local traditions and culture, was inferior to the austere Wahhabi form they had seen in Mecca and the other centers of Islamic life.

They strove to apply its strictures in their own country, where Sufi traditions had blended with local cultural legacies. Those who refused to acknowledge the new ‘pure’ version of Islam were murdered, including close family members. Others were enslaved, just as Daesh enslaves ‘unbelievers’ today. The conflict became known as the Padri wars.

Historical accounts of the Padri wars say they stretched from 1821 to 1837. The Wahhabi faction might have prevailed, but their philosophy denied the legitimacy of local rulers, who were naturally reluctant to give up their power and fought back. The Dutch colonists, initially tied down in a war in Java, finally were able to assist the rulers and defeat the Wahhabi adherents. Ironically, the attempt to impose an austere form of Islam on the people of West Sumatra ended as a springboard for Dutch expansion into other areas of Sumatra.

For NU, the war against the Wahhabi has been a long one, and it is still not finished. Said Aqil Sirodj warned in October 2015 that Daesh wants to expand its network across Asia by 2017. And, while he did not provide any sources to back up his statement, he added that it is aiming for a global caliphate by 2022. That would absorb Indonesia, Malaysia and Muslim areas of the southern Philippines, answering the prayers of hard-liners in the three Southeast Asian states.



NU General Chairman KH Said Aqil Sirodj. Photo: Harian Terbit

The right to innovate

In opposing the Wahhabi theology, the proponents of Islam Nusantara realise what they are taking

on. They are actively pressing for revisions of Islamic law to outlaw practices such as killing of so-called apostates and slavery.

Yahya Staquf admits that, as the law – *fiqh* – currently stands, Muslims have a problem. “The introduction of slavery by Islamic State is based on Islamic law,” he says. “What can we do about this? Logically, we must revise Islamic law.”

On the question of slavery, he states that:

This is a question of jurisprudence and perhaps it needs to be re-interpreted. Other factors need to be considered such as the relationship between people of different religions. What we believed hundreds of years ago isn’t necessarily relevant or appropriate today.

This represents *bi’dah* – innovation, which in the Muslim sense is usually a negative connotation. One hadith is reputed to state: “Every *bid’ah* is a going astray and every going astray is in hellfire” (although the point is made that in Arabic ‘every’ means ‘nearly every’.)

The website Masjid al-Muslimiin states the following:

God ordered Muslims not to divide themselves into sects. Innovations and divisions in matters of religion and worship within Islam are considered to be contamination, error, and deviation.

And this:

The changing of God’s laws is forbidden in Islam. God condemns religious leaders who alter divine principles. One who attempts to make changes places him or herself on the same level with God, committing polytheism. An example of this would be to make the killing of innocents lawful. The laws of God are perfect and do not need to be ‘modernised’ by anyone.

The question of *bid’ah* goes to the heart of the scriptural argument between Islamic State and other Muslims, including Islam Nusantara. Holland Taylor, a former US telecom tycoon who has been working for years with NU, notes that for most Muslims there are acceptable and unacceptable *bid’ah*.

The latter would include attempts to change the basic rules of Islam. “If someone says it is not necessary to pray five times a day (that) is unacceptable *bid’ah*. But to ‘innovate’ by adjusting the practice of Islam to current circumstances is acceptable to many,” he states.

To Daesh, any *bid’ah* is unacceptable. They insist on the application of *fiqh* as formulated in the centuries immediately after the Prophet Muhammad. These were times of violence and bloodshed, and required a violent stance but the Wahhabi argue that Muslims must live under the laws that applied at that bloodthirsty time.

For NU, that is erroneous. Its teachers point out that the *fiqh* that Daesh insists still applies to society was not formed by the Prophet himself but by the Umayyad and later caliphates that came a century later.

As such, this interpretation of *fiqh* cannot be seen as the word of God. Instead, NU believes that Islam should reflect changing times. “They are not bound by the letter of the law but by the spirit of the law,” says Taylor.

This presents a diametrically opposed view of Islam. Islam Nusantara is setting itself up as the champion of tolerant, moderate Islam, rejecting all forms of violence. Yet it too has engaged in violence.

In the wake of an aborted pro-communist coup in Indonesia in September 1965, Muslim mobs, with major involvement of Ansor, the NU youth group, embarked on a slaughter of communists and sympathisers. Accounts vary of the death toll, but at least 500,000 people died, clogging rivers in Java and Bali with dead bodies.

This bloody history leads many to reject a role of Islam Nusantara and NU from attempting to oppose Islamic State. Those with blood on their own hands cannot now claim to be the champions of peace and tolerance, they argue.

I put this to Said Aqil. “We have to see this in the context of history and not just the outcomes,” he replied. “There were many actions of the PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party) that opposed the beliefs of the Indonesian people and many conflicts occurred.”

The PKI became increasingly confrontative in the wake of a rebellion in the East Java town of Madiun in 1948, as nationalists were still fighting the Dutch for control of the country. Put down harshly by the Indonesian Army, the communists regrouped quickly and aimed their venom at traditional societies.

“Between 1948 and 1965 there was no time when there was not conflict between the PKI and the followers of Islam, especially NU,” says Said Aqil. “If we look at this from the perspective of the day, not today’s perspective, it compares to periods of conflict elsewhere in the world. The past is the past.

“There is no need for an apology (for the killings, as many demand). Leaders in the regions have approached the descendants of those that were killed and come to good terms. We don’t need to apologise.”

Said Aqil is keen to stress that NU and Islam Nusantara is about peace, not conflict. Yet it is not difficult to see NU and Ansor taking out the knives once again, this time not against communists, but against hard-line Wahhabi groups if they continue to contest the right of Indonesian Muslims to believe in the religion that has been theirs for centuries.

So far it has not come to that. But in distributing the film *The Divine Grace of Islam Nusantara* widely, NU is mounting a direct challenge to Islamic State and the Wahhabis. Yahya Staquf states that the film is an invitation to Muslims everywhere to reject radicalism and theological straight-jackets and stand up for their own cultural adaptation of Islam.

“They have the right to be Muslims and still retain their own civilization and culture. What the world needs now is to learn about the true nature of the threat.

“Islamic State is a part of Islam and the threat is real. We need to build a coalition and the will to combat this. The threat is what it is and we need to build a consensus on how to address the threat... We consider this a threat to all humanity.”

Keith Loveard has been reporting on Indonesia since 1990.

<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2016/01/14/daesh-islam-nusantara-and-shades-of-grey/>

Indonesian online warriors pulling the beard of radical Islam

AMANDA HODGE THE AUSTRALIAN MARCH 30, 2016 12:00AM



Malcolm Turnbull says Indonesia and its reformist President Joko Widodo are a global role model for “tolerant and inclusive Islam”.

When the head of Indonesia’s largest and most moderate Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama, joked that men with beards tend to be stupid — and the longer the beard the more stupid the man — there was apparently method in his madness.

Just as there was in an unflattering observation about those Indonesians wearing trousers above their ankles in the Arab style of conservative Muslims.

“It was just a joke but actually it works in a very effective way because the fact is those people already infected by extremist ideology usually wear beards,” NU Supreme Council general secretary Yahya Cholil Staquf said of chairman Kyai Said Aqil Siradj’s inflammatory comments.

“Not everyone who wears short trousers is radical but most radicals wear short trousers. Some people didn’t like it but it helps ordinary people in villages easily identify who is to be avoided.”

The message was clear; imported, conservative versions of Islam are not welcome in Indonesia's tolerant and pluralist Islam Nusantara (archipelago Islam).

Yahya says NU wants "to give our people confidence that we're also legitimate. We don't have to follow whatever Arabs say about Islam".

It is this Indonesia that Malcolm Turnbull referenced last week when he cited Australia's northern neighbour and its reformist President Joko Widodo as a global role model for "tolerant and inclusive Islam".

"Australia has a vital interest in seeing President Widodo's commitment to tolerance succeed," he said, though NU leaders worry Jokowi's government shows too great a tolerance for fundamentalists opposed to Indonesia's pluralist model. However, the Indonesia that US President Barack Obama spoke to *The Atlantic Monthly* about was one that was increasingly receptive to Wahabist Islam propaganda and the sacks of Saudi money that inevitably fund the madrasahs, imams and teachers to support it.

Obama, as an example, pointed to far greater numbers of Indonesian women wearing the hijab than when he lived in the country as a child. Indeed, as Haji Yahya spoke last week of Indonesia's tolerant, pluralist Islam, the country's highest clerical body, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), flagged its intention to ban Muslims from wearing clothing linked to other religions.

Meanwhile the flow of Indonesians joining Islamic State and the like fuels fears sophisticated terror networks could be revived in the world's most populous Muslim country.

So which Indonesia is it?

"Actually your Prime Minister is right and Obama is also right," says Yahya. "From the 1980s money started to pour into Indonesia from the Middle East to propagate this Wahabist ideology and it's getting stronger and stronger. They are succeeding in infiltrating many different elements of society."

Military officers were joining groups ideologically opposed to Pancasila — the principles of monotheism, humanism, democracy, unity of nation and social justice that underpin the Indonesian state — and most Hizb ut Tahrir followers were civil servants.

"But we still have the potential to protect our Islam Nusantara. It's a global war we're waging and we can't just rely on the natural instincts of the people. We need to consolidate, we need resources."

Indeed, the government at the weekend banned the Islamic sect Gafatar as a deviant religion. The move was the latest setback to the country's commitment to protect minorities and tolerate diversity, following the targeting of the LGBT community.

The 90-year-old NU, which has 40 million followers in Indonesia alone, has an army of several thousand religious scholars that work "offline" in communities, as well as in its 14,000 schools, to counter the spread of extremism.

More recently it has been using partners around the globe to spread its moderate Archipelago Islam model to counter the nihilistic, sectarian messages of Islamic State and other extremist groups dominating the media landscape.

But at a launch in Jakarta last week of the Vienna Observatory for Applied Research on Terrorism and Extremism — a joint venture with Vienna University and the LibForAll Foundation, Yahya admitted the NU was losing the online fight: its up to 400 online activists were volunteers, self-funded and not rich.

"Since 2010 we've been raising donations every month to give money to them just to buy internet credit. Sometimes they have to surrender what they're doing when the website they're working on shuts down because they can't pay. This happens a lot."

They are no match for what Ali Fisher, a research fellow with the University of Southern California's Centre on Public Diplomacy, calls the "swarm cast" of the media mujaheddin which constantly re-establishes accounts as quickly as Twitter can block them.

In the four months from last October, Dr Fisher tracked 3.4 million tweets referencing Islamic extremism, 3.3 million accounts and 1.8 million websites.

NU follower Zainal Maarif, a part-time Islamic schoolteacher, goes into battle online to counter extremist narrative using the Koranic references of his ideological nemeses to disprove their arguments. He acknowledges it is a David and Goliath battle against such a well-resourced opponent.

"I am on standby all the time via my smartphone. I respond to any invitation for online debates," he says. "But I struggle with financial issues. I've been hacked many times and lost many websites because I can't afford to pay the domain fees.

"We need more people to do this. We need more support to get articles and thoughts translated and read across the world."

Dr Fisher said the mismatch between the lakes of money available in the West for counter-terrorism and the dilemma for Indonesia's grassroots online activists is nonsensical.

"The problem with Western organisations is they want to fund their own organisations. We have a situation here where young activists are struggling to pay for internet to try to fight it out online and meanwhile millions is being spent by governments and organisations saying we need to build something. It just doesn't make any sense," he said.

"After the (January) attack on Jakarta we talked about the victims and attackers. The policemen who stood their ground, outgunned and outmanned, barely got a mention outside Indonesia and yet they were ... standing in the way of people trying to take extremist action. They weren't prepared to back down."

Holland Taylor from LibForAll says "Indonesia has very strong antibodies" against extremism.

"One of the key elements in addressing (Islamic State) is to assert that it's OK to have your own cultural expression of Islam. That's the purpose of this Islam Nusantara campaign; to show that we still have that here."

At a time when the world is desperate to engage with moderate Islam, NU could be "a serious threat to ISIS", he insists.

If only it had the framework.