DE-RADICALISATION IN INDONESIA: DISCOURSES AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the convergence of counter-terrorism strategies and de-radicalisation discourses in Indonesia. Key zones of contestation include the classroom with young impressionable pupils, modern society with alienated and dislocated citizens, prison cellblocks with fertile grounds for the spread of radical and pathological ideas, and new media with near-unlimited scope for the diffusion of knowledge. As in any country, Indonesia's challenge to terror is imperfect and subject to reversals. Counter-terrorism is a means to limit, manage and mitigate terror. Very few claim to be able to eradicate such a threat. Beyond lethal force, there are reflexive, subtle, innovative strategies at the disposal of the Indonesian authorities. Given the constant friction between civil liberties and democratic rights on the one hand, and security imperatives on the other, governing authorities and policymakers are advised to continue consolidating political reforms that began in the transition of May 1998.

Keywords: counter-terrorism; de-radicalisation; Indonesia; Islam; strategy; discourse

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 World Trade Centre and Pentagon attacks, Christopher Hitchens (2002) correctly noted that the ceaseless deployment of the word terrorism had a suffocating effect. Fatigued lexicographers struggled to rescue the word from overly-induced political statements, ambiguous editorials, hypocritical policy pronouncements and the misguided essentialism of what Mamdani (2002:766) termed as 'culture talk'. Despite these reservations, Hitchens (2002) portrayed terrorism as an extension of nihilism, with terrorists being irrational, cruel and vicious, fanatically demanding the impossible at gunpoint or knife-edge. It is important therefore to rescue the term from obscurity, to retain it as an important instrument of condemnation.

Some scholars refuse outright to engage in terror debates, dissatisfied with the loaded nature of the term. Professor Duncan

McCargo, for instance, specialises in the southern Thai conflict. In a *Guardian* column in 2009 McCargo discussed the bloody violence and insurgency at length without once using the term terrorism. This column generated 87 online responses from enlightened readers, and terrorism rapidly became the focal point of the discussion. One respondent pleaded (unsuccessfully) with McCargo to 'show some honesty and state that he doesn't support the murderous terrorists who are destroying southern Thailand'.

As a point of departure, the professional discourse in Southeast Asia has gradually shifted from terrorism to the clinical study of radicals, radicalism and lengthy processes of de-radicalisation. Islam remains at the centre of the debate, a focal point of reference at all levels. Reacting to increasingly derogatory caricatures of Islam filtering out of influential Western media and literature, Chandra Muzaffar (2009:1) warns of 'ignorance compounded by prejudice' and 'aversion alloyed with antagonism'. A critical look at the ideational battleground reinforces the fact that simplistic dichotomous categories of good Muslims versus bad Muslims are not very helpful. Rather, one should strive for the sort of agonising introspection and deepening of knowledge that Booth and Dunne (2002) advocate. This should begin with a survey of scholarly work on Islam in Southeast Asia, starting with Hefner's (2000) civil Islam, for instance, and advancing to discursive contests such as Rahim's (2006) liberal Islam versus literal Islam.

Beyond military metrics and spectacle wars, secret intelligence and elite policing, there is a highly-contested discursive sphere that deserves further attention. This article therefore traces the convergence of counter-terrorism strategies and de-radicalisation discourses in Indonesia. Key zones of contestation include the classroom with young impressionable pupils, modern society with alienated and dislocated citizens, prison cellblocks with fertile grounds for the spread of radical and pathological ideas, and new media with near-unlimited scope for the diffusion of knowledge. Such an investigation benefits from the recent work of Abrahms (2008) on infiltration strategies, and Sidney Jones (2010) on the dangers of Indonesia's 'word warriors', those non-violent radicals who frequently fall under the radar and are difficult to contain.

Terrorism is a Loaded Term

Not all observers agree with Hitchens (2002) about the fundamental irrationality of terrorists. A glut of recent studies and research projects have sought to reveal the 'strategic logic' of suicide terrorism

(Pape 2003), the 'geometry' of terrorism (Black 2004), the 'motives for martyrdom' (Moghadam 2008-09) and the 'organisational capabilities' of terrorist groups (Horowitz 2010). The moral relativism of the terror debate is captured by Noam Chomsky (2002), who goes to great lengths to distinguish between the terrorism of the weak and the terrorism of the powerful (usually read as state-sponsored terror). The pirate's maxim is used to illustrate Chomsky's main argument: when a pirate in a small vessel attacks the sea it is the act of a thief, whereas a powerful ruler can invade the whole world with naval force and be celebrated as an emperor. Terrorism is generally argued to be a weapon of the weak (asymmetric power), an act perpetrated by individuals or groups against civilian targets for specific purposes (usually symbolic, often political). Provoking an overreaction or frenzied response has emerged as perhaps the key objective of terrorism (Zakaria 2010).

The imperfect process of countering terrorism and defending against radicalism requires flexible strategies that are considered an art by some and a science by others. There is no panacea or magical formula, so we do our best to cope with and adjust to this new age of 'sacred terror' (Rapoport 1984). The best general strategy for Indonesia is to strengthen democratic institutions and continue to devolve authority to the outer provinces to ensure political legitimacy, redistribute wealth and quell unrest. Sydney Jones (2008) calls for an integrated de-radicalisation programme, directing attention towards the Indonesian courts, the police, prison systems, schoolhouses and new media outlets, and warns against the establishment of a repressive Malaysian-style Internal Security Act.

In an ongoing discursive contest, Indonesian authorities continue to enlist properly vetted Islamic leaders and Muslim scholars with 'epistemic authority' to dispel myths, counter radical teachings and dismantle extremist ideologies (Kruglanski et al. 2010). By logical extension, this war of words is taking place in the classroom, and Indonesian authorities have long been targeting Islamic boarding schools such as al-Mukmin and Darusy Syahadah (*Pikiran Rakyat* 2009). There are also spontaneous initiatives by civil Islamic organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama aimed at countering distorted teachings and promoting 'true' religious values and model citizens (Sijabat 2010). Not all counter-terrorism measures are quite so quaint, of course. The killing of three bank robbers on 19 September 2010 with suspected links to terror groups in Medan by Densus 88 (Indonesia's elite counter-terrorism unit) demonstrates that a grand integrated strategy requires both lethal force and gradual de-radicalisation. Table A below demonstrates just how prevalent terrorism has been in recent years. From Aceh and Solo in Indonesia to Patani in southern Thailand and Mindanao in southern Philippines, radical

Islam has been grabbing headlines, confounding policymakers and security forces alike. Friction between civil liberties and democratic rights on the one hand, and security imperatives on the other, is constant.

Table A – Chronology of Terrorist Bombings in Indonesia

Date of Bombing	Particulars
1 August 2000	Philippines Embassy in Jakarta
27 August 2000	Malaysian Embassy complex in Jakarta [*no fatalities*]
13 September 2000	Jakarta Stock Exchange
24 December 2000	Christmas Eve bombings in Jakarta, West Java (Bekasi, Sukabumi, Bandung), East Java (Mojokerto), Nusa Tenggara Barat (Mataram), Sumatra (Medan, Pematang, Siantar), Batam, Riau (Pekanbaru)
23 September 2001	Atrium Plaza Senen, Jakarta
12 October 2001	KFC restaurant, Makassar [*no fatalities*]
6 November 2001	Australian International School, Pejaten, Jakarta [*no fatalities*]
1 January 2002	New Years bomb outside of a chicken restaurant in Jakarta
12 October 2002	Kuta and the American Consulate in Denpassar, Bali
5 December 2002	McDonalds in Makassar, South Sulawesi
3 February 2003	Police headquarters, Wisma Bhayangkan, Jakarta [*no fatalities*]
27 April 2003	Terminal 2F, Soekarno-Hatta International Airport
5 August 2003	JW Marriot Hotel Jakarta
10 January 2004	Cafe Bukit Sampoddo Indah, Palopo, South Sulawesi
26 July 2004	General Elections Commission, Jakarta [*no fatalities*]
9 September 2004	Australian Embassy in Jakarta
12 December 2004	Church of Immanuel, Palu, Central Sulawesi [*no fatalities*]
21 March 2005	Two bombings in Ambon, Eastern Indonesia
1 October 2005	Kuta and Jimbaran, Bali
31 December 2005	Marketplace in Palu, Central Sulawesi
11 November 2006	A&W restaurant, East Jakarta

17 July 2009	JW Marriot and Ritz-Carleton hotels, Jakarta
Total of 22 terrorist bombings, 296 fatalities	

Psychopathology and Prison Islam

Pathological personalities are said to be drawn to terrorism, along with those experiencing social alienation, geographical displacement, and especially those who are widowed. Therefore the importance of group solidarity and shared ideology in developing strong affective ties with fellow terrorists is absolute (Crenshaw 2000; Abrahms 2008). So what is to be done? Beyond the sledgehammer method (lethal force and coercion) a more nuanced approach has been called for to reduce terrorism's social utility and attack the social bonds at the core of all such groups. Indeed, the goal of most modern de-radicalisation programmes has been to drive a wedge between members of an organisation by infiltration, breeding internal mistrust and resentment. One specific strategy has been to work with prisoners in order to cultivate a new group of informants and double-agents.

According to data compiled by the *International Crisis Group*, the majority of Indonesian men convicted of radical Islamic terrorism are held in Java (Cipinang prison Jakarta, Kedungpane prison Semarang, Kalisosok prison Porong), Bali (Kerobokan prison), and South Sulawesi (Makassar). Records from October 2007 showed 124 men arrested for terrorism, half of whom were considered Jemaah Islamiyah members. One obvious dilemma is whether to treat convicted terrorists separately from other inmates. ICG (2007) found that integration is better than segregation based on an analysis of solidarity-building and recruitment opportunities. Though the implementation of de-radicalisation programmes is highly secretive, and the new recruits anonymous, we know that the focus is usually either ideological or behavioural. Ideological efforts are about renouncing violence (attitudinal modification), while behavioural modification is about disengagement (Horgan 2008).

The dominant Indonesian approach from 2000 onwards has been creeping de-radicalisation. This 'soft approach' involves efforts to build extensive webs of paid informants and former militants, with the expectation that they can help persuade radical hardliners to change their ways through discursive efforts and material incentives. An obvious limitation to this approach is that former prisoners are regarded with suspicion and struggle to infiltrate radical groups. Moreover, prisoners that are granted early release are often inclined to renew their subversive

activities and rejoin militant movements. One example was the prisoner, Urwah, who renewed contact with the infamous Malaysian leader Noordin M. Top (now deceased) after being released from prison in March 2007. De-radicalisation is incremental and subject to reversals such as the devastating July 2009 suicide bombings of the JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton hotels in Jakarta. Nevertheless, cautious observers still believe that creeping de-radicalisation is paying dividends.

The Ideational Battleground

One area that deserves careful and sustained scrutiny is the ideational battle being fought simultaneously on multiple fronts – inside prisons and classrooms, through new media, on the streets, and in the powerful corridors of officialdom. Mahmood Mamdani (2002) spoke out against the political campaign to reduce counter-terrorism to a civil war between good Muslims and bad Muslims, whereby the latter must be quarantined and ultimately exorcised. We are certainly free to object to the argument that there is a simple fault line dividing moderate, genuine Islam from radical extremist Islam. It must be recognised, however, that it is standard practice throughout Southeast Asia for authorities and media to deploy what are presented as moderate Islamic discourses in the effort to counter deviant teachings and transgressors. De-radicalisation is rather more complex, involving efforts to synthesise the ethics of Islam with various fields of modern thought, and to purge corrupt teachings and textual misreading by infiltrating schools, prisons and social forums.

Radicalism is generally associated with 'pure' Islam (Wahhabism, Salafism) and calls for a return to the straight path (*as-sirat al-mustaqim*) of original Islam. It is also a derivative of 'literal' Islam based on absolute *shari'a*, striving to create a secure area for Islamic life and law, where Islam is religion and regime (*din wa-dawla*). From these very basic precepts a cross-pollination of Indonesian extremists emerge from groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah, Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, Darul Islam, Laskar Jihad and Front Pembela Islam (Hasan 2007).

Moderate beliefs, teachings and practices are associated with forms of 'liberal' Islam, usually eclectic, sometimes tolerant of Sufism, and 'civil' Islam that is supportive of democracy and the separation of mosque and state (Hefner 2000). In addition, a type of 'silent' *shari'a* exists whereby a degree of flexibility is granted to believers and practitioners, and certain issues are intentionally left for humans to resolve. A similar convergence of moderate individuals and groups occurs, for instance, within and between members of Nahdlatul Ulama,

Muhammadiyah, Jaringan Islam Liberal and Majelis Ulama Indonesia. The juxtaposition of moderate and radical has been widely criticised as overly simplistic, ossified and compartmentalised (Laffan 2003; Hamilton-Hart 2005; Renwick 2007). Indeed, it is argued that these two broad categories are not impervious, and that sensationalised portrayals of radical Islam disconnected from the mass of ordinary Muslims is distorting (Kolig 2005). There is a vast ideological spectrum in which radical ideas are integrated and blended in.

One of the most comprehensive efforts to dispel myths and correct popular misconceptions of the Islamic faith is Esposito's (2002) *Unholy War*. This book carefully examines concepts such as *hijra* and *jihad*, concepts that are used selectively by radicals and extremist 'holy warriors' to serve particular purposes and agendas. *Jihad* is by origin a prophetic call to people to reform their communities and live a good life based on religious belief (Esposito 2002:30). A defensive conception of *jihad* appears in the earliest Quranic verses in response to the *hijra* – forced emigration from hostile un-Islamic environments. Verse 22:39, for instance, grants leave to those who were wrongly expelled from their homes to fight, while verse 2:190 instructs that they must 'fight in the way of God with those who fight you, but aggress not: God loves not the aggressors'.

Discursive battles continue over the correct and precise readings of Quranic injunctions that provide detailed guidelines and regulations for the conduct of war. Some examples include verses 48:17 and 9:91 regarding who can fight and who is exempted, verse 2:192 about the cessation of hostilities, verse 47:4 on how prisoners should be treated, and verse 2:294 concerning proportionality in war. Several injunctions set out a mandate for peace (verses 8:61 and 4:90), while others address holy martyrdom (verses 3:157 and 3:169). Esposito (2002:30-33) concludes that it is forbidden to kill non-combatants, women and children, monks and rabbis, meaning that all are given the promise of immunity unless they had taken part in the fighting. With the expansion of Muslim communities, religious scholars (*ulama*, the learned) developed the *shari'a*, an Islamic law seen as the ideal blueprint for Muslim life (Esposito 2002:34). Over the ages, when Muslim rulers declared and conducted *jihad*, legal experts (*muftis*) provided legal opinions (*fatwas*) to legitimise or challenge *jihad*. In March 2010 a Pakistani cleric named Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri joined in the race to discredit suicide terrorism by issuing a 600-page *fatwa* that supposedly 'leaves not a single stone unturned' (*Al Jazeera* 2010).

De-radicalisation and Re-education

In Indonesia there are plenty of word warriors competing for media attention, funding and influence in an ongoing discursive contest. The toxic preaching of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, a radical religious official (*ustadz*) based in Central Java, has long posed a dilemma for Indonesian authorities. One dilemma is censorship versus rightful expression in a legal, democratic context (Kolig 2005). Though Ba'asyir's views are noxious, bigoted and could possibly have residual effects (violence), it is widely held that they must not be met with authoritarian repression. This would undermine democratic achievements, legal mechanisms, and drive such ideas underground, leading to dangerous subterranean movements. After a series of arrests and linkages to the Bali bombings, Ba'asyir has been released and formed a new organisation called Jamaah Ansharud Tauhid, one that is above-ground and non-violent, though still rejects democracy and calls for immediate implementation of *shari'a* (ICG 2009).

Indonesian authorities typically rely on pragmatic strategies of intelligence gathering and policing, which are intended to compliment de-radicalisation and re-education programmes aimed at inoculating vulnerable groups against extremist ideology (ICG 2007). This involves enlisting the help of trusted or acceptable religious leaders to engage with and counter radical indoctrination and perverse notions of *jihad*. Controversially, counter-terrorism officials have been known to hold garden barbeques with convicted terrorists, offering them and their families reduced prison sentences, cash payments and health care in return for cooperation. After extensive assessment and clinical study, intelligence officers have determined that the perpetrators of terrorist acts such as the Bali bombings were 'sincere in their beliefs, yet sincerely ignorant' (Tumanggor 2007). They did not allow alternative discourses to challenge their convictions, which were based on religious distortions.

As a preventative measure, trusted religious figureheads are being sent out to schools, mosques and social forums, focusing on *pesantrens, pondoks* and *madrasahs* in order to reverse dangerous misperceptions. Beyond such 'travelling roadshows' authorities have made innovative use of new media and focused on youth activities (ICG 2007). It has been determined that many centres of learning are independent and family-owned, designing their own curriculum free from any affiliations, political or otherwise. By contrast, a number of state-run *pesantren* (or those following the state curriculum) have been linked to terrorism.

The triad of prison authorities, officially-sanctioned religious preachers and intelligence agents have been criticised for their narrow focus on *jihad* and rather thin re-education programme that has failed to

achieve a lasting ideological transformation. By contrast, a surprising development has emerged following a severe rift within *Jemaah Islamiyah* that led to the creation of the *Majelis Dakwah Umat Islam* (MDUI). MDUI members have engaged in spontaneous public outreach in order to counter violent religious teachings and practices. This demands a much more in-depth focus on faith in general, and MDUI stresses the importance of appropriate levels of knowledge and enlightenment that are needed prior to any discussions of religious precepts and injunctions.

Conclusion

Returning to Sidney Jones's (2010) warning about Indonesia's word warriors and the new wave of '*jihad*-by-the-pen', a small number of non-violent radical groupings such as *Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid* remain elusive and difficult to contain. Ward (2009) reinforces this view, analysing the inflammatory but ultimately passive organisation *Hizbut Tahrir* Indonesia. These organisations actively campaign on Facebook, maintain internet websites, blogs and publishing companies, and openly distribute leaflets on the streets in major metropolitan centres. As a general rule, the current government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono prefers subtle co-optation to direct confrontation, and therefore, the continuation of a quiet policy of containment can be expected.

As in any country, Indonesia's challenge to terror is imperfect and subject to reversals. Counter-terrorism is a means to limit, manage, and mitigate terror. Very few claim to be able to eradicate such a threat. Beyond lethal force, there are reflexive, subtle, innovative strategies at the disposal of Indonesian authorities. Obvious pitfalls remain, however, as many convicts reject de-radicalisation, terror leadership remains elusive, and corruption continues within the ranks of police, military and government officials. Nevertheless the dangers of collective thinking will have to be rigorously challenged, and all stakeholders in counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation in Indonesia must continue to engage simplifications and transcend unhelpful dichotomies.

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