

# MP-IDSA *Backgrounder*

## Trends of Radicalisation in Indonesia

*Akash Sahu*

June 12, 2020

### *Summary*

Increasing radicalisation in Indonesia has led to multiple terror attacks in the country, mostly targeted against foreign tourists and minorities. The government has taken several measures towards counter-terrorism, but with limited success. In recent years, online platforms and especially social media have become the preferred choice of the radical elements to propagate their ideas among the Indonesian people, who largely follow moderate Islam. The youth are more vulnerable to being conditioned with misinterpretation of Islamic beliefs, often calling for violence in the name of 'jihad'. An effective counter-narrative against radicalisation, supported by religious scholars, could help fight the challenge.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. Historically, its population has subscribed to liberal views and inclusive ideas. However, since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a growing tendency to rebel against the secular state philosophy of 'Pancasila' or five basic principles enshrined in the preamble of the constitution.<sup>1</sup> Post-2000, these sentiments have manifested in the form of well-coordinated terror attacks by militant Islamist groups. Till date, more than four dozen attacks have been committed against the police, religious institutions and foreign tourists.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most notable terror incidents was the Bali attack of 2002 –orchestrated by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) – which left 202 people dead. Since then, the government has initiated several measures to strengthen its counter-terrorism capabilities. However, its efforts are often undermined by the steady flow of radicalised youth recruited by militant Islamist groups.

### Origins of Jihad in Indonesia

The concept of jihad as an armed struggle was first popularised by the Muslim kings of Aceh, Java, Sulawesi and Moluccas in order to fight colonialism. In the 1820s, leaders of the Padri movement in West Sumatra had declared jihad against the Dutch and the local corrupt rulers. In the book *Babad Diponegoro* (Chronicle of Diponegoro), jihad was projected as a war against the non-believers who attacked and robbed Muslims.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the book *Perang Sabil* (the holy war) was instrumental in legitimising jihad against the occupying Dutch in Aceh in the 1870s. However, even as these efforts could not prevent the colonisation of the country, a pacifist interpretation of Islam gradually emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century led by Islamic organisations such as the Muhammadiyah (established in 1912) and the Nahdhatul Ulama (established in 1926). They imparted Islamic values through their educational institutions and charitable activities.<sup>4</sup>

Their narrative, however, was upended by Kartosuwiryo, a notable Islamic cleric who abhorred a secular Indonesian Government. He called for an armed jihad in 1945. Within four years, Kartosuwiryo had established the Darul Islam or the Islamic State.<sup>5</sup> The Darul Islam movement began in West Java and spread to Central Java, South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi and Aceh. C. Van Dijk, the author of *Rebellion*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Indonesian 'Pancasila' comprises of five principles, namely, belief in one and only God, just and civilised humanity, unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by the unanimity of deliberations amongst representatives, and social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia. See "[Pancasila](#)", *Bahasa Kita*, January 18, 2018; and "[Pancasila, The State Philosophy](#)", *Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, Romania*.

<sup>2</sup> Tatiana Kanunnikova, "[Strengths, weaknesses of Indonesian counterterrorism](#)", *Asia Times*, February 08, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Taufiqur Rahaman, "[The Trajectory of the Discourse of Jihad in Indonesia](#)", *Analisa*, 1 (2), December 2016, pp. 160-179.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *Penuntun Perang Sabil* by M. Arsjad Th. Lubis and *Ilmu Pertahanan negara dan kemiliterandalam Islam* by Muhammad Hasbi Azh Shiddiquiy were used as guide books by armed groups like Hizbullah and Sabilillah to fight the colonisers

*Under the Banner of Islam-The Darul Islam in Indonesia*, describes this movement as a composite of disagreements within the armed forces, a resistance to the increasingly pervasive central authority, and gradual changes in agrarian structure and Islamic views in the country.<sup>6</sup> A prominent party fighting against colonialism in Indonesia at the time was *Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia* (PSII). It also included non-Muslim groups in its struggle for independence. However, Kartosuwiryo, who was a prominent member of PSII, had a conflict of interest and was expelled by the party.

He had over time gathered local militias like *Hizbullah* and *Sabilillah* and other guerrilla fighters to form the Darul Islam forces. The local people often trusted them more than the central army and provided food and material support. According to the Dutch estimates, this army comprised of 12000-15000 men by 1949.<sup>7</sup> Kartosuwiryo, however, was captured in 1962 and executed by the Indonesian Government.

This led to the Darul Islam movement going underground though it continued to recruit new members. The organisation was responsible for several attacks carried out through the 1970s. Suharto, who took over as president in 1968, and his 'New Order' government which laid special emphasis on 'Pancasila', adopted into the constitution earlier in 1945, was an antithesis to the extremist ideology of Darul Islam. The 'New Order' regime soon eliminated the organisation with several of its members leaving the country.

Some of the exiled members of Darul Islam migrated to Afghanistan in the 1980s where they were introduced to the Salafi jihadist movement. They imbibed the teachings of Ikhwan ul Muslimin of Sayyid Qutb, Abul A'la Al-Maududi of Pakistan and the Salafi ideology of Ibn Taimiyyah and Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab. Three prominent exiled personnel – Abdullah Sungkar, Abu Bakar Ba'syir and Abu Rusdan – later brought the ideology to Indonesia. They also established the JI in Malaysia.<sup>8</sup> During this period, books written by Salafi jihadis like Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri were translated into local languages.

## Jihadi Groups Post-2000

JI was the key radical Islamist group of Indonesia. Set up in 2002 by al Qaeda and others, it carried out several terrorist attacks in the country. Its principal objective was to create an Islamic state in Indonesia. However, the government's crackdown led to its disintegration.

In 2015, Aman Abdurrahman and Ba'syir jointly formed the *Jamaah Ansharout Daulah* (JAD). Today, the organisation has the largest terrorist network in Indonesia. It has emerged as an umbrella body for around two dozen extremist groups in the

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> R.E. Elson and Chiara Formichi, "[Why did Kartosuwiryo start shooting? An account of Dutch-Republican-Islamic forces interaction in West Java, 1945-49](#)", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 42 (3), October 2011, pp. 458-486.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

country. Its members swear allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The Indonesia Government has ordered its immediate disbandment under the Anti-Terrorism Law, 2002. Recently, in March 2020, the United Nations Security Council declared JAD as a terrorist organisation for supplying arms and supporting terrorist activities of the ISIS, listed as al Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>9</sup>

The JAD's founding member Abdurrahman is a graduate of the Saudi-funded Institute for the Study of Islam and Arabic or 'Lipia' and an ardent believer in the idea of Islamic Caliphate. He is described as the 'key ideologue' for all ISIS-affiliated militant groups in Indonesia. He was sentenced to death by South Jakarta District Court in 2018 for his role in 2016 terrorist attack at a Starbucks cafe in Jakarta.<sup>10</sup> He was also responsible for the attack on a bus terminal in Jakarta (2017) and a church in Kalimantan (2016). His writings in prison from 2004 to 2008, especially his 'Tawhid handbook', have been central to his popularity as a jihadist Islamic leader. His influence can be gauged from the fact that he was able to coordinate the 2016 Thamrin attacks even though he was in prison at that time.

Ba'ysir, the co-founder of JAD, had fled the country during the Suharto regime and returned only after its fall in 1998. He thereafter resumed his subversive activities and was jailed for 30 months in 2005 after being charged for the 2002 Bali bombings. Released in 2006, he first founded the Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) in 2008. In 2010, the government raided the JAT headquarters for alleged links to a military training camp in Aceh. Ba'ysir was again arrested and sentenced to 15 years of prison in 2011.<sup>11</sup> The UNSC declared JAT a terrorist organisation in 2012, stating that it "seeks to establish an Islamic Caliphate in Indonesia."<sup>12</sup> Ba'ysir is currently serving his sentence in maximum-security prison of Pasir Putih in Nusakambangan, Central Java.<sup>13</sup>

## Causes of Radicalisation

Sudibyo and Aris Sarjito of the Indonesian Defense University argue that Indonesia has faced radicalism since colonial times. Its fundamental reason, they emphasise, is the common man's isolation from politics, fuelled by "a network of Saudi schools, scholarships, imams and mosques that seek to replace the local interpretation of

---

<sup>9</sup> The JAD is said to have carried out the May 2018 attacks on three churches in Surabaya, a port city on Java Island's east coast, killing at least 13 people and injuring 40 others. Earlier, in May 2017, the group conducted two suicide bombings in East Jakarta, killing three police officers. In June 2017, the group attacked a police headquarters in North Sumatra's provincial capital of Medan, killing a police officer. In January 2016, the group conducted an attack by a suicide bomber and gunmen in Jakarta's shopping district, killing two people and injuring 25 others. ISIS claimed credit for JAD attacks, including the 2018 Surabaya bombings. See "[Jamaah Ansharut Daulah](#)", *United Nations Security Council*, March 04, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> "[Indonesian terrorist Aman Abdurrahman sentenced to death over 2016 Starbucks attack](#)", *ABC News*, June 22, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> "[Abu Bakar Bashir: Timeline of extremism](#)", *ABC News*, June 16, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> "[Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid](#)", *United Nations Security Council*, Updated July 17, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> "[Jailed Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir calls on followers to support ISIS](#)", *The Straits Times*, July 14, 2014.

Islam.”<sup>14</sup> These radical elements, while being suppressed during the Suharto regime, found a voice in the aftermath of the demise of the regime with increasing democratisation aiding the process. However, their political participation, by way of forming political parties and contesting elections, did not translate into electoral victories. This can be attributed to the fact that the majority of Indonesians follow an inclusive moderate Islam.

The political rejection propelled radical factions to pursue a more aggressive strategy in order to gain domestic legitimacy. Violence was a key pillar of this recalibrated policy. Meanwhile, Din Wahid of the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN University) has provided an interesting explanation for the spurt in Indonesian radicalisation. The Salafi ideology, in his opinion, has penetrated both urban and rural areas with people believing that widespread corruption can only be tackled by implementing Shariah and establishing an Islamic Caliphate.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the Islamic ideals of West Asia have found a receptive audience in Indonesia. This is reflected in more women embracing veils with the clergy replicating the Arabic devotional architecture.

Today, the traditional mosques originally built out of thatched or pitched roofs are being replaced with imposing marble towers, funded by West Asian sympathisers. In this context, the Institute for the Study of Islam and Arabic or ‘Lipia’, established with Saudi funding, has expanded its operations by setting up three new branches across Indonesia.<sup>16</sup> It imparts Wahabi ideology as practised in Saudi Arabia. Notably, several terrorists involved in the bombings had studied at the Institute.

A detailed account of interviews of former militants analysed by Ian Chalmers of University of Western Australia reveals that the jihadists hailed from different social classes and generations. The circumstances leading to their involvement in violent jihad included difficulties in employment, dissatisfaction with old Islamic organisations and distrust of the non-Muslims. Ideologically, however, a global conspiracy to destroy Islam and moral justification for use of violence to defend repressed Muslims in Indonesia and across the world were common denominators.<sup>17</sup> The jihadists displayed romanticism in the idea of violent jihad and cited religious legitimacy of their ways. They believed that the noblest form of jihad was the ‘holy war’. Chalmers outlined three main elements of a jihadi belief system, which were all ideologically driven: killing of the non-believers or *kafirs* as the truest jihad, declaring democracy as blasphemous teaching, and labelling the government as ‘hypocrites’ or *pemerintahan jahiliyah* (heathen government).<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Sudibyo and Aris Sarjito, “[Policy and Strategy of Deradicalization](#)”, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 24 (12), December 2019, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Beech and Mukti Suhartono, “[Faith Politics on the Rise as Indonesian Islam Takes a Hard-Line Path](#)”, *The New York Times*, April 15, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Ian Chalmers, “[Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia: Bringing Back the Jihadists](#)”, *Asian Studies Review*, June 12, 2017, pp. 331-351.

Meanwhile, the 2017 ruling by the Constitutional Court on decentralisation of powers has empowered the local governments to frame their own laws.<sup>19</sup> Many districts have increasingly incorporated elements of Shariah within their legal systems, most notably in the province of Aceh. In recent years, its government has met out punishments in the form of public flogging for adultery, homosexuality, gambling, consumption of alcohol and public display of affection. Women have been harassed and often forced to wear the hijab.<sup>20</sup>

## Online Radicalisation

Indonesian extremists are extensively using the internet to spread their ideology. A calibrated strategy at radical online dissemination was first developed and implemented by Imam Samudra, who was convicted for the 2002 Bali attacks. He began his work in 2000 when he joined yahoo list-serves. This included the JI's online jihadist news website 'Al-Bunyan'. It disseminated information and updates on local jihad battlefronts in Ambon and Poso. Imam Samudra was a regular contributor to the posts as 'Rere Tambusai'.<sup>21</sup>

His memoir 'cyber-jihad', which also elaborated means to online hacking, gained significant traction at the time.<sup>22</sup> He even created an online religious study group via relay chat in mIRC (internet relay chat client).<sup>23</sup> Notably, it was Muhammad Jibril, a senior member of JI, who recruited Tuah Febriwansyah, an Indonesian citizen and former Hizb ut-Tahrir member, and better known as Muhammad Fachry, from the same study group.<sup>24</sup> Fachry developed the first professionally run jihadist website in Indonesia – *Arrahmah*. This news website employs a salaried staff and provides daily updates to its subscribers. The website receives about 6,00,000 hits per month.<sup>25</sup> It even gets advertisements from large Western companies and had previously used Google's Ad-sense.<sup>26</sup>

The country's first major financial cybercrime, of approximately US\$ 7, 00,000, was orchestrated by one of Samudra's men in 2011. Cahya Fitriyanta was an IT student in Surabaya Institute of Technology. He met Samudra through his mIRC chatting

---

<sup>19</sup> Simon Butt, [“The Indonesian Constitutional Court: Reconfiguring Decentralization for Better or Worse?”](#), *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*, 2019, pp. 147-174.

<sup>20</sup> Derrick A. Paulo and Tan Jia Ning, [“20 years of syariah: From floggings to vigilante attacks, how far will Aceh go?”](#), *Channel NewsAsia*, September 01, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> [“Online Activism and Social Media Usage Among Indonesian Extremists”](#), *Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC)*, Jakarta, Report No. 24, October 30, 2015, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Nava Nuraniyah, [“The Evolution of Online Violent Extremism in Indonesia and the Philippines”](#), *Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)*, London and *IPAC*, Jakarta, Global Research Network on Terrorism and Technology: Paper No. 5, 2019, pp. 1-16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> See the [website of Arrahmah](#).

<sup>26</sup> Robert Cookson, [“Jihadi website with beheadings profited from Google ad platform”](#), *Financial Times*, May 17, 2016.

platform. He hacked into a Malaysian online currency trading site, accessed its database and transferred money to his local bank account.<sup>27</sup>

A 2017 study by the UIN University in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that younger Indonesians, who are internet savvy, are not only more vulnerable to radical ideas than non-active users but also more intolerant of other religions and believed that violence should be used to protect Islam. More than 88 per cent of the 1,859 respondents in this study believed that the government should ban the minority groups while another 10 per cent were in favour of a theocratic Islamic state.<sup>28</sup> Today, the younger Indonesians often prefer to learn more about Islam from social media than traditional preaching in mosques. Irfan Abubakar, a researcher from the UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, believes that this practice leads to an incomplete understanding of Islam.<sup>29</sup>

In this context, Solahudin, a terrorism expert at the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, Indonesia, provides a valuable insight into the process of radicalisation and how it leads a radicalised youth to launch a terror attack. During his interview of 75 terrorists, it was found that 85 per cent of them committed acts of terrorism within a year of being exposed to radical ideas. This time frame earlier used to be five to 10 years before the advent and extensive usage of social media.<sup>30</sup>

Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are the two largest Muslim organisations that profess a moderate approach to Islam, but these organisations fail to interest the younger generation. Nine of the top 10 such websites in the country preach Wahhabism. Terrorism Expert Ridwan Habib believes that this is because of the lack of representatives from Nahdhatul and Muhammadiyah.<sup>31</sup> It has been observed that websites with radical leanings provide a more engaging platform and use innovative ideas to attract youth. For instance, two major groups producing jihadist content are Gen. 5.54 and Saveme project. Both have e-magazines and android apps to attract the younger generation.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from taking recourse to Facebook and Twitter for their online propaganda, the radical groups have also extensively used alternative platforms like Telegram which is infamous for allowing groups to circumvent government surveillance. According to a George Washington University report, “telegram serves as a stable online platform

---

<sup>27</sup> Cahya is among the few who acknowledged that they were radicalised through the online media. Some sites in that regard are unjustmedia.com, inshallahshaheed.wordpress.com, qoqaz.com and ekhlas.net. See IPAC, no. 21, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> [“Social media is facilitating Islamic radicalisation in Indonesia”](#), Editorial, *ASEAN Today*, February 20, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> [“Internet contributes to radicalism among young Muslims in Indonesia: Study”](#), *The Straits Times*, February 24, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Ainur Rohmah, [“How social media helps spread extremist content in Indonesia, and what’s being done about it”](#), *South China Morning Post*, January 20, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> *ASEAN Today*, no. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ainur Rohmah, no.30.

for pro-IS content, an ecosystem for building extremist networks, effective and secure internal communications tool, and a forum for recruiting new IS members.”<sup>33</sup>

The radical groups have mastered the art of bypassing governmental checks, especially in the digital medium space. This can be attributed to the loose nature of cyber laws and control. Young radicalised recruits bring their IT expertise to the terrorist groups. Their work, as explained by Nava Nuraniyah of IPAC, is a key vector of the three steps that form the core strategy to radicalise an individual:

- Branding – This is perhaps the most important step where the brand is built carefully through the effective use of symbols and slogans. The core objective is to create a distinct identity for the audience that sets it apart, for instance, from its older generation, or its peers from another religion. These are usually validated by religious myths and twisted interpretations of religious text, often claiming to be validated by Caliphate or its higher officials.
- Recruiting – This involves the second step wherein the potential recruit is contacted by the group. It is anchored in instilling a sense of sacrifice and emotional vengeance that often act as triggers to convince an individual to join the terror group.
- Fundraising – This stage involves raising funds. These are usually carried out by way of raising money for the families of martyred jihadists. Gashibu Project and Aseer Crue Centre seek to raise money for the wives and children of terror inmates online. Funds can be easily moved through Western Union money transfer and other mechanisms. Interestingly, women are preferred in these operations in order to avoid suspicion.<sup>34</sup>

Once the financial and human resources are in place, the group systematically trains and deploys its recruits for terror operations.

## Counter-Radicalisation Efforts

The Indonesian Government has taken several steps to counter-radicalisation and terrorism in the country. It has enacted the Electronic Information and Transactions Act in 2008, through which it keeps track of offensive and inciting material on the internet. In 2015, the government had shut down 22 websites for displaying extremist propaganda but had to reconsider its decision amidst public outcry over violation of free speech.<sup>35</sup> The banned websites included radical Islamist sites like *Arrahmah* which was developed by Fachry of JI.

Recently, the Indonesian Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform prohibited women from wearing the *niqab* to their workplace. However, according to the order issued by the ministry, the *niqab* can be worn outside their workplace.

---

<sup>33</sup> Sirwan Kajjo and Rio Tuasikal, [“Former IS Member Combats Online Radicalization in Indonesia”](#), *Voice of America*, December 26, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Nava Nuraniyah, no. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Haeril Halim and Hans Nicholas Jong, [“Govt unblocks radical websites”](#), *The Jakarta Post*, April 01, 2015.



Meanwhile, the religious ministry is planning to ban around 167 textbooks that have radical content.<sup>36</sup> The government is also in the process of creating a website where the public can report about civil servants found sharing radical contents online. In this context, a 2017 study by the Alvora Research Centre observed that one in five civil servants and 10 per cent of the state enterprise workers did not believe in the secular state ideology of 'Pancasila' and instead favoured an Islamic theocratic state.<sup>37</sup> Minority communities such as the followers of the Ahmadiyya sect, the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) population and also the non-Muslim places of worship have increasingly become the target of attacks. Church bombings in eight provinces on Christmas Eve of 2000 by JI, suicide bombing in a church in Central Java in 2011, bombing in Ouikumene church of East Kalimantan in 2016 and three church bombings in Surabaya in 2018 are cases in point. Violent attacks on religious minorities show an increasing trend according to the Jakarta-based Setara Institute. There were 216 such cases in 2010, 244 in 2011 and 264 in 2012.<sup>38</sup>

After the 2009 hotel bombings in Jakarta, the state authorities established the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) in 2010. This department is responsible for taking measures aimed at preventing terrorist attacks and coordinating de-radicalisation programmes for the returnees of jihadist wars in places like Syria and Afghanistan. The BNPT's counter-terrorism squad – Densus88 – has received acclaim for its work. It has thwarted several terror attacks apart from bringing down several jihadi cells of JI. The success of BNPT can be attributed to gathering systematic and timely intelligence as well as undertaking swift action. It also runs a website called DamailahIndonesiaku.com which contains correct information on ideologies and beliefs in the country.<sup>39</sup> In 2017, the National Cyber and Encryption Agency (BSSN), was founded as the main institution to govern cybersecurity. It directly reports to the president.

Indonesia has also actively engaged the United Nations (UN) to combat terrorism. It is cooperating with the UN agencies such as the Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), Terrorism Prevention Branch–UN Office for Drugs and Crime (TPB-UNODC) and the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UNCTED).<sup>40</sup> Jakarta has initiated steps to implement the core elements of the UN counter-terrorism strategy. It is also a co-sponsor of the UNSC Resolution 2178 on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF), which calls upon countries to take necessary steps to prevent recruitment as well as ensure rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists. This forms a key pillar of the Indonesian strategy to reintegrate its citizens who had earlier joined the ISIS in Syria.

---

<sup>36</sup> Amy Chew, "[Indonesia targets niqab and 167 Islamic books to counter rising tide of extremism](#)", *South China Morning Post*, November 14, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> "[In Religion's Name; Abuses Against Religious Minorities in Indonesia](#)", *Human Rights Watch*, February 28, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Syarif Saddam Rivanie Parawansa, Koesrianti and Toetik Rahayuningsih, "[Prevention of Radicalism in the Cyberspace in Indonesia](#)", *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*, 6 (7), July 2019, pp. 63-72.

<sup>40</sup> "[Indonesia and the Counter Terrorism Efforts](#)", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia*, April 07, 2019.

However, some experts have highlighted key flaws in the Indonesian strategy. Ismail Hasani from the Setara Institute notes that the initiative where civilians report civil servants' espousal of radical content is likely to be ineffective and can even lead to abuse of power.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, a January 2020 report of the International Centre for Violence and Terrorism Research postulates that eight out of the 10 terror attacks in Indonesia in 2019 could have been prevented. It also highlights the unique Indonesian trend of the involvement of family networks, particularly wives, in carrying out militant activities.<sup>42</sup> The report stressed the need for tailor-made de-radicalisation programmes not only for men but also women and children.

The civil society too has sought to contribute towards the de-radicalisation initiative. Hundreds of Indonesian citizens who have returned home after fighting in Syria are being rehabilitated by the Civil Society Against Violent Extremism (C-SAVE) – an umbrella organisation responsible for fighting radicalism in the country. The Director of C-SAVE, Mira Kusumarini, believes that the returnees are in a better position to highlight the false promises held out by the ISIS to its potential recruits in Indonesia.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Habib Husein Ja'far al-Hadar is a preacher who posts videos urging young people to verify the source of online contents and discard those which preach hatred and violence.<sup>44</sup>

### Conclusion

The government has invested considerably in strengthening its counter-radicalisation efforts but has had mixed success so far. Newer measures could include the expansion of powers of the BNPT to block radical internet content through a pre-determined threshold. Steps could be taken to spread greater awareness among the people about provocative contents available online. Similarly, strict monitoring mechanisms to timely detect logistical networks through which the jihadists receive weapons and financial support are necessary to avert terrorist attacks in the country.

As the ISIS has shown an increasing presence in Afghanistan, which remains a battleground for jihad, the government must take steps to effectively prevent radicalised youth from travelling and swelling the ranks of ISIS abroad, for de-radicalising returning jihadists is a far more resource-intensive process.

The Nahdhatul Ulama's *Islam Nusantara*, with its emphasis on Indonesia's traditionally inclusive Islam, characterised by its harmonious past,<sup>45</sup> and

---

<sup>41</sup> Amy Chew, no. 36.

<sup>42</sup> ["2020 Outlook: Think Tank Forecasts 'Low-End' Terrorism in Region"](#), *Benar News*, January 09, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Notable individuals spearheading the de-radicalisation initiative include activists like Naila Syafarina whose sister is a Syria returnee and has witnessed first-hand the threat posed by the ISIS. See Sirwan Kajjo and Rio Tuasikal, no. 33.

<sup>44</sup> See Habib Husein Ja'far al-Hadar's [Videos on YouTube](#).

<sup>45</sup> Arifi Saiman, ["Islam Nusantara: A soft power diplomacy"](#), *The Jakarta Post*, February 18, 2017.

Muhammadiyah's *al-wasatiyyah*, meaning the middle path in Islam, too could be popularised among the youth through popular media, films and music.

A de-radicalised former JI militant Yusuf Adirama has been campaigning for putting an end to violence in the name of religion. He has also established a *warung* or cafe business in the hills outside Semarang. People visit there to meet a 'reformed jihadist'.<sup>46</sup> It will thus be helpful to create a counter-narrative to the jihadist discourse within the country, which could essentially be a 'nip in the bud' strategy. The role of religious leaders and clerics in creating such a counter-narrative would be monumental.

---

<sup>46</sup> Ian Chalmers, no. 18.

## About the Authors

**Akash Sahu** is a Research Intern at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

**The Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA)** is a non-partisan, autonomous body dedicated to objective research and policy relevant studies on all aspects of defence and security. Its mission is to promote national and international security through the generation and dissemination of knowledge on defence and security-related issues.

*Disclaimer:* Views expressed in MP-IDSA's publications and on its website are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the MP-IDSA or the Government of India.

© Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), 2020