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INDONESIA'S RESPONSES TO ISLAMIC STATE

by Dina Afrianty

Summary:
- A clear consensus has emerged among Indonesia's government, Muslim organizations, and public opinion rejecting the Islamic State, its agenda, and the brutality of its campaign to establish an Islamic caliphate in Syria and Iraq.
- Seeing the initial government response as weak,Muslim organizations took the lead in urging the government to prevent Indonesians from traveling to Iraq and Syria to fight with Islamic State, and to ban those currently there from returning to Indonesia to avoid a repeat of Indonesia's experience with returning "Afghan jihadis" through the 1990s and early 2000s – culminating in the 2002 Bali bombing.
- President Joko Widodo has, since taking office in October 2014, announced a number of steps to prevent Islamic State ideology from taking root in Indonesia, including travel bans to and from Syria and Iraq, monitoring of Indonesians living and traveling elsewhere in the Middle East, and revision of Indonesia's prison deradicalization programs.
- Steps in recent years to incorporate conservative religious parties into the political mainstream and the ensuing increase in public piety have largely robbed advocates of Islamic State's radical agenda of a recruiting base and paved the way for a strong, anti-Islamic State consensus.

The anti-Islamic State Consensus

With local and international media continuing to report on the violence and brutality of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) – including killing both Muslims and non-Muslims and destroying Islamic historical sites including the tomb of the Prophet Jonah – Indonesian Muslims have rejected the call made by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, for Muslims to join the war to create an Islamic caliphate.

This rejection of IS spans government policy and the spontaneous response of individuals and, importantly includes a wide range of Muslim organisations. Indonesians have posted their anger and condemnation of acts of brutality on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Banners and flyers posted in public spaces in villages and towns across Indonesia also repudiate Islamic State and its agenda: 'Tolak ISIS – NKRI Harga Mati' or 'Reject ISIS, The Unitary Republic of Indonesia is the price of death', and, 'NKRI YES, ISIS No' or 'Yes to the Unitary Republic of Indonesia, No to ISIS'.

While likely Government-sponsored, these banners send a clear message reminding Indonesians not to be deceived by Islamic State's appeal for the creation of an Islamic caliphate. Indonesian authorities are playing the nationalism card, effectively arguing that support for IS will threaten national unity. Indonesian authorities have repeatedly warned that the ISIS agenda is not in line with Indonesia's national Pancasila ideology and presents a threat to Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity. (Berger 2014: Perdani and Ina, 5 August 2014)

Muslim Civil Society Leads the Way

This unity between the state and key Muslim civil society organisations regarding the threat posed by Islamic State appears to have emerged only following the declaration of the caliphate in mid 2014, and the release of a video of an Indonesian jihadi calling for fellow Indonesian Muslims to join ISIS. The Indonesian government was previously seen as being too soft.

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As Berger (2014) put it, the Indonesian government showed little interest in responding to the threat ISIS posed to a peaceful Indonesian Islam during the first half of 2014. ISIS flags appeared among other Islamic religious symbols at pre-electionpublic rallies in the major street close to the Presidential Palace in Jakarta. Groups allegedly sympathetic to Islamic State organized a number of religious gatherings around Indonesia allegedly. For example, a group calling itself the Islamic Sharia Activists Forum (FAKSI) organised a public gathering to show support to ISIL at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) campus mosque in the outskirts of Jakarta. (Perdani, 8 August 2014) The event triggered immediate public outcry when it was reported that this group used the event to take an oath and pledge loyalty to IS. (Trisna, 7 August 2014) The Muslim public opinion condemned athorities for allowing the event to take place at the State Islamic University, known as a center of moderate Islam, and demanded a crackdown on FAKSI. The State

Islamic University's administration subsequently stated that it would not let the campus be used for radical teachings or the promulgation of IS ideology. (Perdani, 8 August 2014) Moderate Indonesian Muslims also questioned the government's commitment to standing up against the spread of ISIL radical influence when the Police, under pressure from some Indonesian Islamists, laid charges of blasphemy against the Editor of the English Newspaper, the Jakarta Post, following publication of a cartoon depicting ISIS militants executing prisoners on 3 July 2014. The Islamists perceived the cartoon, which was intended to criticize Islamic State's the use of Islamic symbols in the violent and brutal execution of IS prisoners, as insulting to Islam.

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These incidents demonstrate that some Indonesian Islamists believe ISIS is fighting for a legitimate Islamic cause, and is, thus, worthy of support. Abu Bakar Baasyir, the former leader of Jemaah Islamiyah who is currently in prison for involvement in the Bali Bombings, has declared his allegiance to ISIS. The response to IS has been far from uniform, even among Indonesian Islamic radicals. Baasyir's own group, JI, has split over his pledge to IS. One detrimental effect of this split within Islamist ranks is that he links and lines of communication between radicalized individuals/groups and potential Islamic State recruiters are likely to remain murky. This lack of clarity as to radical loyalties could actually complicate the law enforcement effort as compared to the response during the early 2000s.

The Government Response

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono condemned IS in August 2014, following the release of a video showing ISIL militants beheading US Reporter James Foley in August 2014, charging that what ISIL has done to Islam is an embarrassment. (France-Presse, 21 August 2014) At the same time, Commander of the Armed Forces, General Moeldoko announced that his office would work with the pesantren community to reintroduce pancasila into the pesantren curricula. (Berger 2014)

Indonesia's new President, Joko Widodo, has taken more concrete action against ISIS campaigns to recruit Indonesians to join the conflict overseas. Upon coming to office in October 2014, President Widodo declared that his government will prevent Indonesians from travelling to Syria or Iraq. He has subsequently announced plans to monitor the movements of Indonesian citizens living in the Middle East and reinvent the prison deradicalisation program for convicted terrorists. Lastly, the government has expressed its commitment to working with traditional Islamic educational institutions – pesantren and madrasah – as well as religious leaders and Muslim organizations to promote a tolerant and moderate Islam.

The Indonesian government also recently announced that it will revoke the passports of Indonesians who have travelled to Syria and Iraq and prevent their return to Indonesia. (The Jakarta Post, 16 January 2015) Tedjo Edhy Purdjanto, Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs, announced that 'We (the Government) will revoke the passports of those who plan to go abroad to join ISIS and those who are already abroad with ISIS. They cannot be allowed to come home'. (The Jakarta Post, 16 January 2015) In the government's view, allowing foreign fighters to return to Indonesia would give them the opportunity to influence other Indonesian Muslims and inspire them to violent, radical and extremist acts in a tragic replay of Indonesia's experience with fighters returning from the conflict in Afghanistan in the early 1990s. Many of these returnees contributed directly to the rise of violent extremism and numerous terrorist acts in Indonesia, including the 2002 Bali bombing.

A range of Muslim organisations have strongly supported the government's position on IS. The Indonesian Government applauded a statement made by the National Ulama Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI) in August 2014 that ISIL is a violent and radical movement that has tarnished the image of peaceful Islam and that its movement clearly stands against Islam. In an official statement, the Chairman of MUI, Professor Din Syamsuddin called upon 'Islamic organisations to step up their vigilance and to guard against ISIL efforts to use them'. (Perdani, 8 August 2014) The MUI demanded that the government ban ISIS ideology to prevent its influencing Indonesian Muslims. The Ulama Council also declared the ISIS radical campaign to create an Islamic ummah as counter to Pancasila and, thus, a threat to the unity of the Republic. As in other areas of public policy (such as blasphemy) there is little separation between MUI and Government policy.

The two largest Muslim-based civil society organisations - Muhammadiyah and Nahdhatul Ulama – issued similar characterizations of the

threat from Islamic State ideology. Kyai Hasyim Muzadi, former Chairman of the Nahdhatul Ulama, the largest Muslim Based Organisation (MBO), condemned ISIL as un-Islamic and warned Indonesian Muslims against its promotion of violence, adding that its campaign to promote Islam was not appropriate to the situation in Indonesia. He said 'ISIS is a new phenomenon in the Middle East, which is by no means appropriate to Indonesian conditions'. (The Jakarta Post, 4 August 2014) He then warned the government that the infiltration of radical ideology has been made easier since the reform era with the establishment of various new Muslim organisations.

Political Reform and the anti-Islamic State Consensus

This general consensus between Government, Muslim public opinion, and the major Muslim organisations regarding the influence of Islamic State marks a major departure from Indonesia's earlier responses to extremism. This may, in part, be the result of Indonesian political reforms in recent years. Radical groups such as Laskar Jihad, Jamaah Islamiyah, Majelis Mujahidin, and The Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) have been effective in gaining wider support under Indonesia's democratisation. These groups are often reported as endorsing violent means of protecting and promoting Islam. However, as conservative Islamic political parties have become an influential voice in Indonesian politics, those radical groups operating outside the system seem to have less currency. The injection of religious agendas into the political sphere has undermined support for extremism and, therefore, narrowed the space for radical voices.

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Indonesia's anti-Islamic State consensus also reflects the particular character of the IS agenda and the challenge it poses to existing state structures. Indonesian democracy has been strongly coloured in recent years by the need to respond to public demands for recognition of Indonesia's Islamic identity. This has included political support for various legal and regulatory measures (such as regional syari'ah regulations and national measures such as an anti-pornography law) and an obvious flourishing in public piety including growth in the prevalence of Muslim attire and Islamic print media. Some elements of Indonesian civil society have expressed concern over what they see as an increasing Islamic conservatism in public policy and growing influence of an alliance of conservative and radical organisations. While the Government has always maintained vigilance against the threat of Islamic terrorism, inspired at least in part by a historical fear of secessionist threats, the threat represented by IS clearly marks a development beyond any previous experiences with radicalism and extremism. It seems, also, to be forging an unprecedented consensus among the diverse players in the Indonesian political landscape.

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