Chapter - IV

Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism

There are few groups among the different sectors of Indonesian Muslims who are demanding enforcement of *shari'ah* as the state law. This chapter will discuss the origin and formation of such groups and their influence on the secular nature of the Indonesian polity.

The recent developments in the Islamic movements throughout the world compelled the ruling party to be more leaned towards conservative Islamic parties or groups. They funded generously to construct more Islamic institution like, mosque, *madrasah*, *pesantren* etc. and made special arrangements for the Haj pilgrims and gave certain immunities to the fundamentalist groups who are indulged in subversive activities.\(^{177}\)

A large number of ulama and theology students who were unemployed for a long period got employment as a result of growing pressure from Islamic forces in the country. It also promoted the younger generation to pursue their career in Islamic studies particularly the low-income group. As the aids from the Arab world and religious dissemination ushered in, the proliferation of the theology students grew rapidly, after the 1980s and 1990s. By the year 2002 the number of *pesantren* alone grew more than ten thousand.

The Islamisation in Indonesia has been a gradual but less significant process as reflected from its constitution *Pancasila*, which embodies a secular nature of the state. Significantly, most of the Islamic parties and organizations which are as old as the 'Indonesian state', have never been able to muster substantial political support in any of the General Elections concluded in the country so far. However, there is a marked change in the thinking of the youth in recent years. Since the 11th September terrorist attacks, almost all the Islamic youth organizations have staged anti-US protest rallies throughout.

\(^{177}\) Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", Viking Penguin India, New Delhi, p.115
the main Indonesian cities, unveiling a new face of Indonesian Islam, hitherto unknown to the world.

The recent terrorist attacks in Kuta Beach of Bali in the first week of October 2002 have once again highlighted the rapid percolation of religion based terrorism in Southeast Asia in general and Indonesia in particular. This kind of terrorism has tried to gain legitimacy from its own interpretations of the tenets of Islam. They have tried to import the Taliban version of Islam based on purist medieval values.

It must be recalled here that as opposed to many Arab-Islamic nations, Indonesia has been more or less a peaceful country where a liberal interpretation of Islam has ruled the hearts of more than ninety percent of the people. However, for almost a decade now, a new wave of intolerance has been over-shadowing the Islamic Diaspora worldwide and Indonesia too, has not been left unaffected by this upsurge. Stories of communal violence and ethnic cleansing seem to be gaining a permanent place.

As I have earlier mentioned (see the chapter I) Islamisation has become synonymous with fundamentalism and when these religious fanatics indulge in violence, it is known as Islamic terrorism. Unlike the case in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where fundamentalist non-secular values have percolated deep in the demographic space, the impact of Islamic revivalism in Indonesia has been limited by the very fact that they have not taken deep roots yet in its civil society. In the new era of Islamic fundamentalism, the ultimate aim of Islamic states is to export its ideology with moral and logistic support to the countries near and far meaning thereby that the confines of geographical frontiers should no longer limit the spread of Islamic terrorism. Now, with the global proliferation of this new variant of Islam, the states of Southeast Asia i.e. Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia have become extremely vulnerable to the threats of terrorism, which has ostensible implications for India's strategic role in the region to a large extent.

 Polemics on the relationships between Islam and politics and Islam and democracy in the nation-state have once again come to the fore in Indonesia after the fall of Suharto. This has much to do with the rise of "political Islam", one of the most visible political
developments in post-Suharto Indonesia. Many believe that the rise of political Islam, represented by so many “Islamic parties”, will bring serious political repercussions to the future of the Indonesian state, which until today has been based on Pancasila.

Despite the fact that the first pillar of Pancasila is belief in One Supreme God, many, if not most, foreign observers perceive this exclusive Indonesian principle of state as essentially secular. This argument is further supported by the fact that Indonesia has not adopted any particular religion as the official religion of the state. Yet, most Muslims love to argue that the Indonesian State is neither secular nor theocratic. For them Pancasila is in full compliance with Islamic beliefs and teachings. The first point in Pancasila, for instance is simply another reformulation of the Islamic belief in One Supreme God, (Tauhid)

A number of groups in the past attempted to replace Pancasila with Islam as the basis of the Indonesian state. In the 1950s the Masjumi Party struggled in parliament to do so. Then came the Darul Islam (Islamic State) rebellions with (Negara Islam Indonesia), and even declared Indonesia as an Islamic State in 1948. However, despite these abortive efforts the Islamic forces within the country continued their struggle for the establishment of an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups. The oppression of

\[178\] Declaration of Holy War against the Dutch
Order of the Day: The Holy War, the Total War Is the War of All the People against the Dutch.

Command: All Ummat Islam of the Indonesian Nation are to start the total Holy War, a total war until oppression (colonialism) is destroyed absolutely. It is ordered that all Indonesian Islamic armed forces lead and help the people until the Revolution of Islam is finished and the Indonesian Islamic State is established in its perfection throughout Indonesia.

GOD’s WORD: Correct, know your mistakes and lessen (them), and struggle physically on the road of God. Indeed I have given you the victory!!!

Madinah 19 Satar 1368
20 December 1948
Govt. of Negara Islam Indonesia
Imam. S.M. Kartosoewirjo

fundamentalist organizations also continued under successive regimes, which includes not only those potential groups that subscribed to the idea of an Islamic state, but also against any dangerous manifestation of political Islam.

After Suharto’s fall in 1998, some forty “Islamic parties were set up; 20 of them passed the selection to participate in the 1999 general elections. Their prospects were very doubtful. Firstly, these parties have only caused acute political fragmentation, leading to confusion among Muslims at the grassroots level. Open fighting broke out among fanatic supporters of the Islamic parties, even among members of the largest organization Nahdlatul Ulama, who supported different parties.

Secondly, trapped in medieval Islamic romanticism these parties were relying heavily on the illusory support of the country’s 88% Muslim population. Many leaders believed that PDI Perjuangan would not get large mandate because of the highly sensitize gender issue, and doubts over Megawati’s capability to handle the grave problems which the country was facing. The Muslim leaders also underestimated Golkar’s connections with Suharto. But defying all the speculations PDI Perjuangan won the largest block of votes, followed by Golkar.

The 20 Islamic parties together could garner only 37.1% of the total votes. In 1955, Islamic parties had got 43.9% of the total national votes. The decline in the percentage of votes and its shrinking mass base left many of sympathizers of Islamic parties reeling under utter disbelief. Many Muslims became worried that the election results marked the end of Islamic politics in the country. So the questions like what is the prospect for the Islamic parties, or even political Islam, how viable is the idea of stronger and formal connections between Islam and the Indonesian nation-state etc. still preserved in the womb of future.

The recently concluded elections once again confirmed that Islamic parties are far from being popular among Indonesian Muslims. One important reason for this is that most of Indonesian Moslems are more leant towards “substantive Islam” than “formalistic Islam.” Therefore, there is no convincing sign that the majority of Muslims subscribe the idea of
formal Islamic politics. No prominent Muslim political leader subscribes to the idea or aims at establishing an Islamic state in Indonesia at the expense of the Pancasila. Leaders, such as Yusri Ihza Mahendra, Deliar Naer, Ahmad Sumargono, Thamrin Iskandar Ihza Mahendra, Deliar Noer, Amad Sumargono, Nur Mahmudi Ismail, AM Fatwa, Salahuddin Wahid and many others, have stated that their parties do not aim at Islamic state. Former President Abdurrahman has long considered the idea of an Islamic state as having no precedent in Islamic history.

Amien argues that there is no religious obligation for Muslims to establish an Islamic state. Nur Mahmudi, first President of the Justice Party (Partai Keadilan) - which is considered to represent a new spirit of contemporary Islamic political revival - also maintains that the substance, not the formality is important. The indication of the unpopularity of formal Islam among Muslims here shares similarities with the growing appeals regarding the application of shari’ah, Islamic law, in Indonesia. The idea and appeal of this application dates back to the early days surrounding independence.

Muslim leaders introduced the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution (“Indonesian state is based on the belief in One, Supreme God”), the obligation that adherents of Islam implement shari’ah. This stipulation is known in Indonesia as “The seven words” of the Piagam Jakarta (Jakarta Charter). Before long this stipulation was dropped, following objections from Christian leaders and “secular nationalists” who argued that the Constitution should not give preferential treatment to any religious group. Furthermore, the Constitution should maintain the integrity of national plurality. The move was strongly opposed by most MPR members and the issue of the shari’ah application once again failed within the highest political institution. Outside the MPE, groups like the Laskar Jihad, Islam Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam) and other similar groups continue to seek the application of Islamic law.

In the name of Islamic law they have attacked nightclubs, discotheques, and alleged brothels. The rise of these groups seems to have more to do with the government’s failure to enforce the law, leading to take the law into their own hands. As long as the government is weak, these groups will hold sway at certain times and places to engage in
the principle of “encouraging good, prohibiting evil” (*amar ma’ruf nahi munkar*) in their own way. The reasons for the unpopularity of the demands of such groups are clear: First, hard-line groups are only splinter groups of the vast majority of the Muslims mainstream. The nature of Indonesian Islam, which is primarily tolerant and peaceful, will prevent these groups from exerting significant influence.

If Indonesia succeeds in reestablishing political stability and economic recovery the radical tendencies in Muslims will automatically decrease. Secondly, most of moderates have to lead the nation out of the crisis and refrain from strongly criticizing Megawati since this would only provoke hard-liners further to question her legitimacy and ability to lead the country. One example is Amien, who vigorously criticized former Presidents B.J. Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid. Not least important is the changing attitude of vice President Hamzah Haz. In the case of the US led attacks on Afghanistan, he has been criticized for his unclear and conflicting statements. Some even believe a split occurred between him and the President. This observation has some truth, but that is not the whole story.

One has to admit that there is some suspicion within certain circles towards Hamzah Haz. He is the national leader of the United Development Party (PPP), which is known for its support to the reintroduction of the Jakarta Charter. However, his more recent comments suggest adjustments and compromises, not only to the harsh realities of Indonesian politics, but also to President Megawati. 179

A year back, the Singaporean police busted a big stratagem of few Islamic jihadi groups, preparing to destabilize Singapore and its neighboring states. Terror cells of Saudi-based Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaida network planned and financed a series of lethal bombings in Indonesia and Philippines over the last two years to exacerbate crusade with the aim of creating an Islamic state in Southeast Asia.

A terrorist group Jemah Islamiyah has deliberately planned a campaign of terror and violence against the Christians of the region. This group has been involved in various

inhuman and dastardly acts of violence. Last year authorities confirmed that the group was planning to explode seven trucks of bomb simultaneously on selected targets in Singapore, which included the US embassy and American business centers. Police in this region had arrested scores of suspects allegedly connected to the network in March 2002. Authorities in Malaysia and Singapore have identified Abu Bakar Basyir, an Indonesian cleric as the ideological leader of the Jemah Islamiah. The authorities allege that these Muslims are waging a crusade to establish an Islamic state though he (Abu-Bakar Basyir) has denied his hands in the Kuta Beach bombing.

Two significant players in the terror game identified by authorities are Riduani Isamuddin alias Hambali, who is an Indonesian cleric, and Faiz Bin Abu Bakar Bafna, a Malaysian. Hambali is wanted by both Singaporean and Malaysian police in connection with many terrorist activities. Indonesian authorities have also issued an arrest warrant for him. The police suspects that Hambali may be hiding in Pakistan.

Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia have been suffering from Islamic terrorism for a long time. The umbrella Islamic terrorist organization Al Qaida stepped up its activities in the region after their recent failures in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Singapore authorities arrested 13 Muslim extremists in the last December who were masterminding a big blast in a posh locality of the town. They were trying to acquire 21 tones of ammonium nitrate with which they would have built massive bombs, which may have killed thousands. The destructive power of ammonium nitrate can be understood by the fact that a nine-storied federal building in Oklahoma was destroyed in 1995 with just one ton of ammonium nitrate. These terrorists belong to the Jemah Islamiah (JI) cells, which seems to have direct link with the Al-Qaida trained operatives. They have spread from the Middle East to the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.¹⁸⁰

The most striking part of the process of Islamisation in Indonesia is the fostering of more than 10 thousand pesantrens and madrasahs.¹⁸¹ The rise of political Islam in post-

¹⁸⁰ Gautam Kumar Jha, “Indonesia towards Conservative Islam” (editorial) The Pioneer, New Delhi, November 24, 2002
¹⁸¹ The number is based upon the report from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesia
Suharto Indonesia is evident from several recent developments in the Indonesian polity. The first noticeable development was the participation of a great number of Islamic parties in the 1999 General Elections. These parties have mostly organized themselves along strict ‘Islamic values’ and have shown disrespect for Pancasila (the soul of the Indonesian constitution). The second important development is the increasing demands from certain groups of Muslims for the official adoption and implementation of shari’ah as the state law. The other prominent transformation in this direction is the proliferation of radical Muslim groups, such as the Lashkar-e-Jihad (Jihad Troop), the Front Pembela Islam (Islam Defenders Front), the Hizb al Tahrir (Party of Liberation) and the Angkatan Mujahidin Indonesia (The Jihad Fighter Group of Indonesia) etc. in the country.

**Article 29 of 1945 Constitution**

There have been great chorus of debate upon the inclusion of shari’ah into the constitution since the inception of the Megawati Sukarnoputri as the President of Indonesia. The recent debates over the amendment of 1945 Constitution in the MPR and

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183 According to Muhammad Sa’id Al-‘Ashmawi Shari’ah: The term shari’ah appears as such only once in the Quran: “Men we set thee upon an open way (shari’ah) of the Command; therefore follow it” (Sura 45, Verse 18), but one finds there three other terms from the same root (Sura 42, Verse 13; Sura 5, Verse 48; Sura 42, Verse 21), In all these places shari’ah signifies not judicial norms but the route or the way. The Quranic sense is the one given in all the dictionaries of the Arab language: The verb shari’ah signifies to go water, and the names shari’ah and shari’ah mean either to give to drink or the slop slope leading down to the water. (See, Lisan al-Arab, Dictionary of Arabic, an article on “Shari’ah”)

At first shari’ah was used in the sense of a path or way of God. To this were integrated the legal rules revealed in the Quran; then those which appear in the prophetic verbal traditions (hadith), and later the exegesis, glosses, opinions, (fatwas), and judgements-in brief, all that completes and clarifies these fundamental rules in order to constitute Islamic jurisprudence (fijih) as this has taken shape in history. In the profane sciences, one can use a word in the sense it has acquired in the course of a long history; nothing authorizes us to so when it is a matter of a Quranic term. There any changes of meaning lead inevitably to deforming the sense of the text and thus corrupting Revelation. Authentic Islamic fundamentalism should always begin by rediscovering the sense had by the Quranic term at the time of their revelation, based upon the Quran itself and on the ancient sources. To restrain oneself to only their present sense leads to grave danger for Islam and for the whole society.

In simple term shari’ah advocates very strict rules as it is advocated by the Wahhabbis and most of the Islamic countries have not implemented it so far.

inclusion of shari‘ah has drawn a divisions between the nationalist and conservative Islamic force in the country. In the June 2002 as the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR) wrapped up its four-year-long amendment process during the Annual Session, the debate continued, although inconclusive among legislators over the incorporation of shari‘ah into the Constitution. ¹⁸⁴

Outside the MPR, demonstrators hit the streets of Jakarta, Bandung in West Java and Makassar in South Sulawesi as thousands of people demanded that the MPR should adopt a clause calling for the imposition of shari‘ah. Experts, however, have voiced concerns that the debate in the MPR has more to do with seeking support from Muslim fundamentalists rather than cleansing the country of its moral decay.

"I fear it's all a farce based upon the short-term interests of certain political parties," said historian Anhar Gonggong. He said, he doubted that the parties were actually thinking of implementing shari‘ah as they knew the majority of Muslims here opposes the idea. But with some of their constituents demanding the imposition of shari‘ah, Muslim-based parties have to think about if they sided with their nationalist peers in promoting a more secular version of Islam here, political analysts have said.¹⁸⁵

Hamzah Haz, the present Vice President of the country and the Chairman of the United Development Party (PPP), has been criticized for his soft corners towards Islamic hardliners. The PPP and the Crescent Star Party (PBB) insist on adding the last phrase of an earlier version of Article 29. In 1945, the nationalists had to drop the phrase as they had to face complaints from the predominately Christian eastern parts of Indonesia, and as they tried to conform to the ideal of a pluralistic society.

"Our founding fathers reached a consensus, and opening that debate again is a step backward," Anhar said. He

¹⁸⁴ Ibid
dismissed the arguments, which suggested that imposing shari'ah would improve the nation's morality, saying that morality should start with the political elite.¹⁸⁶

Anhár also accepts that many Muslims practiced their religious duties by adhering to shari'ah privately and Islam in Indonesia is working without shari'ah. Under a strict interpretation, shari'ah has inhuman policy of the offenders for example, stoning for adultery and hand amputations for thieves etc. very few countries have adopted this version of shari'ah with the exceptions being found in the Middle East. Among Southeast Asian countries this idea is an alien to the existing cultural pattern, although calls for imposing strict Islamic law also exist in Malaysia. Despite the polemic in the MPR, public discussion of the issue is rare. Political parties are not able to explain how to implement shari'ah in a pluralistic society such as Indonesia. Demands for the shari'ah surfaced when the constitutional amendment process began in 1999. But the issue has largely remained the concern of Islamic fundamentalists and lacks the support of the country's two largest Muslim organizations- Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. Indonesia's only example of a working shari'ah arrangement is found in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam province.¹⁸⁷ It has been law in the country's westernmost province since January as part of a special autonomy package that includes promoting the practice of Islam. According to Teungku H. Imam Suja, who chairs the Muhammadiyah branch in Aceh there has not been any significant change in the general chorus of the life.

After six months under shari'ah, he said, the province lacked the law and order and forces needed to ensure its implementation. The conflict between the armed separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian state that has raged since 1976 had seriously undermined law and order, and put into question the effectiveness of the implementation of Islamic law. Imam expresses concern that the government's sole

¹⁸⁶ Ibid
¹⁸⁷ "The original Article 29 upholds with the plurality of the nation. Both the Muslim groups considered the article as a blanket protection for all religious worship in Indonesia. According to them, giving formal acknowledgement to one religion, directly or indirectly, will certainly lead to disintegration."
intention in allowing the implementation of shari'ah is to draw local support away from GAM. "We don't want shari'ah that is just a political vehicle," he said.  

Manifestation of the Fundamentalism in Indonesia

There is an assessment that political parties or members of the old Suharto regime are involved in promoting the jihadi groups. The New Order government under Suharto always restricted the political rise of Islam for the same reasons like the first President of Indonesia, Sukarno. Realizing the potentially explosive force of a highly politicized Islam, especially at a time when Islamic fundamentalism was radicalizing politics from North Africa to Malaysia, Suharto foresaw a danger that the emergence of a politically dominant Islam would cleave Indonesian political society along religious lines. Thus the national ideology, Pancasila, was a binding force, which held this large nation together. It is hardly surprising, seeing the political turmoil since Suharto stepped down, that Islamic movements have seized the opportunity to be seen and be heard. The two largest Islamic groups, the 35-million-strong Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), whence PPP originated, and the Muhammadiyah with some 28 million members, dimmed during the Suharto era, quickly regained their power. NU chairman Abduraham Wahid formed the National Awakening Party (PKB), and his counterpart Muhammadiyah leader Amien Rais founded the National Mandate Party (PAN). For the first time in more than 30 years Muslim parties are represented in the Indonesian parliament, and are now conscious of their strength. Does this mean that Indonesia could become a Muslim theocratic state in the future, like Iran or Pakistan? The United Development Party (PPP) groups of Islamic parties, authorized by Suharto to represent all Islamic political factions, had a full makeover and broke its links with the establishment. Vice President Hamzah Haz, who was adamantly against Megawati Sukarnoputri becoming President in October 1999, heads the PPP, which, with another Islamic party, the Crescent Star Party (PBB), has long been campaigning for the revival of the Jakarta Charter. This calls for the adoption of

188 Berni K. Moestafa, “Experts fear debate over shari'ah a political ploy, Jakarta Post, August 18 2002
189 Ibid August 22, 2002
shari’ah (Islamic law) for Muslims, and needs an amendment to Article 29 of the constitution which was rejected by the MPR at its annual session in August 2002.  

The NU, for example, speaks for a membership in excess of 30 million and an unparalleled, grassroots, village-based system of traditional religious schools or *pesantren* that covers the whole archipelago. The modernist Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, is largely middle-class-based, and its philanthropic success in building universities, hospitals, orphanages and different social foundations. Together, the two organizations reach out and touch the hearts and souls of most of Indonesia's "ordinary" Muslims. The extremists are not acting on behalf of the NU and the Muhammadiyah or the government of Indonesia. With their actions they not only threaten the image of Islam but also pose a danger to the preservation of Indonesia as a secular state governed (more or less) in line with the all-inclusive and tolerant Pancasila ideology.  

Megawti’s collaboration with US in fighting the terrorism only signifies the fact that there still exist few senior officers in the TNI who are moderate and adamant to keep the nationalistic ideas alive. Suharto, and his predecessor Sukarno, feared that fundamentalist Islamic elements, the "extreme" right, posed as much of a threat to the unity and security of the state as the communists, the "extreme" left. Unrestrained Islam was not something Suharto and the military would ever allow. Later, Abdurrahman Wahid tried hard to move toward separating religion from the state but found that Islam is too embedded in Indonesian culture to be taken out of politics.

Syafi'i Ma'arif, chairman of Muhammadiyah, however, has frequently warned that mainstream Islamic groups need to stay close to their members and listen to their aspirations, so that the voice of the "silent majority" of mainstream Muslims is heard, at least in the background. The two major Islamic organizations of the country NU and Muhammadiyah however refutes the threat perception upon the traditional plurality of such radical elements however it would be hard to find whether the members of their own organizations are involved in the radical activities.

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190 Article 29 includes *Shari'ah* into the Constitution which is based on Pancasila Doctrine  
191 See The Jakarta Post, 09 August, 2002  
192 The Jakarta Post, August 18, 2002
On 1st November the Indonesian police arrested Abu Bakar Ba’asyir on the charge of the direct involvement in the Kuta Beach attack occurred on 16 October 2002 in Bali. Earlier the similar authority has arrested him on January 24, 2002 when Singapore and Malaysia demanded his arrest in the connection of the different terrorist attack in Malaysia and in Singapore. Ba’asyir is a great admirer of Osama bin Laden as "a true Islamic warrior" who had shown the courage and skill to fight the United States. The summons of Ba’asyir followed the disclosure this month of a plan of Islamic militants to blow up the American Embassy and other American installations in Singapore. Ba’asyir is accused by Singapore of leading a region-wide Southeast Asian terror network, Jemaah Islamiah, or Islamic Group, that is suspected of having ties to Bin Laden's network Al-Qaeda.

One of his graduates, Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi, has been charged in the Philippines with being the chief explosive expert in the plot to attack the United States Embassy in Singapore. Other former students from the school were among 13 Islamic militants arrested by the Malaysian government last month on charges of being linked to Al Qaeda.

The school established by Ba’asyir in the central Java town of Solo, Al Mukmin, or Koranic school where the seeds of fundamentalism are being sprouted. But for the most part of Indonesia, the religious instruction is more relaxed than the militant teaching in Pakistan’s Koranic Schools or madrasahs. Ba’asyir and his school are widely known as an exception to the rule. Ba’asyir was imprisoned in the early 1980's by the Suharto government after calling for an Islamic state in Indonesia. Ba’asyir served three years of a nine-year sentence, and then fled to Malaysia.

After Suharto was ousted in 1998, Ba’asyir and many others who have been exiled during his tenure returned to their schools, where thousands of pupils are enrolled. The school became a funnel for radical Islamic groups in Java, including Lasker Jihad, the most prominent of a cluster of such groups that have sprung up in the last several years.

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193 See for more detail, The Times of India, New Delhi 12 November, 2002 p.13
194 Robert W. Hefner, a professor of anthropology at Boston University and an expert on Islam in Indonesia
Muhammad Baraja another devout clergy has set up a group known as the ‘Surakarta Islamic Youth Front’. After Sept. 11, the group was reported to be involved in scouring hotels in central Java for American tourists. Baraja said, there was no proof that Bin Laden was responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and added: "The United States accuses Ba’asyir of knowing Osama bin Laden because he taught Indonesians about a holy death."  

Among numerous emerging Jihadi groups, there are only few, who may pose a direct threat to the secular ethos as well as the unity of the country.

**Jemaah Islamiah (JI)**

Counterterrorism officials based on information provided by al-Faruq confirm that, Southeast Asia now has the world’s highest concentration of Al-Qaeda operatives outside

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195 “Islamic Cleric in Indonesia Suspected of Ties to Al Qaeda Praises bin Laden” Jakarta Post, January 29, 2002

196 A branch of al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, an international charity based in Saudi Arabia, with offices in several Islamic countries. According to one regional intel memo, Faruq told his interrogators “money was laundered through the foundation by donors from the Middle East.” Government sources told the TIME that US investigators believe the charity is a “significant” source of funding for terrorist groups associated with al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia. Counterterrorism officials are also investigating possible links between al-Qaeda and top al-Haramain officials in Saudi Arabia.

197 Al-Faruq began his career of terror in Asia with the support of al-Qaeda leaders operations chief Abu Zubaydah. His number turned up on Abu Zubaydah’s cell phone, and the two spoke even after the U.S. assault on Afghanistan. See “Time”, September 23, 2002 p. 26
Afghanistan and Pakistan. JI is a militant group that seeks to establish a pure Islamic group aiming at establishing a pure Islamic state in Southeast Asia and is active in at least five countries- Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. Abubakar Ba’asyir, the cleric who is the spiritual leader of JI, “authorized Faruq to use JI operatives and resources to conduct bombings at the US establishments in the countries. Al-Faruq told the CIA that Ba’asyir dispatched a JI member named Abu-al-Faurkan to oversee a planned attack on the US embassy in Malaysia.  

Al-Faruq said Ba’asyir was also behind 1999 bombing of Jakarta’s largest mosque and then blamed Christians for the act.

Ba’asyir is wanted by Singapore for his direct role as the mastermind of last December’s foiled Al-Qaeda plot to bomb US targets there. After October Bombing at Kuta beach in Bali the Indonesian officials have arrested him.

As Islamic terrorism tends to operate barring border and race the terrorist network of Southeast Asia comprising several radical Islamic groups have maintained deep and long-running ties with one another toward a shared fundamentalist goal. Their mode of work is very similar to those of Taliban in Afghanistan and many of these organizations forged partnerships with al Qaeda long before authorities began unearthing the scale of their transnational reach. Jemah Isalmiah is one of the most resourceful and have direct link with the Al-Qaeda working in Southeast Asia.

JI collaborated extensively with other radical Islamic groups i.e. it is closely affiliated with Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia (KMM), (the association of mujahidins of Malaysia) sharing its founders and top leaders, namely, Abubakar Ba’asyir and Riduan Isamuddin, known as Hambali who is the President of MMI. KMM, for its

202 A terrorist organization of Malaysia recently made prominence as probable al Qaeda collaborators.
203 MMI: Indonesian Mujahidin Council, purportedly called non-violent organization, the MMI was founded by Abu Bakar Ba’asyir- the Indonesian cleric also believed to be the spiritual leader of JI, which is run by Ba’asyir’s former student Riduan Isamuddin, known as Hambali. In addition to his alleged links to scores of bank robberies and murders in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, Hambali is believed to have colluded with al-Qaeda since 1995. Western intelligence officials say he played host to two of the Sept 11 hijackers during their trip to Malaysia in 2000. Hambali is thought to have gone into hiding, but his organization remains active. In an interview with Time, JI members said al-Qaeda operatives in the
part, has been linked to Indonesia's militant group Laskar Jihad and to the Philippines' Abu Sayyaf. Asian and U.S. officials now have clear evidence that both Jemaah Islamiah and KMM are also linked to Osama bin Laden's global terrorist network through these individuals and their subordinates. For instance, Yazid Sufaat, is believed to have met and provided logistical and financial help to at least three individuals implicated in the Sept. 11 attacks under Hambali's order. FBI chief Robert Mueller recently singled out JI as al Qaeda's foremost Southeast Asian collaborator. Singaporean sources report that scores of JI members received military training in Afghanistan, and that JI received a huge sum from al Qaeda. In the Philippines, evidence links JI to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), an Islamic separatist group surpassing Abu Sayyaf in number and perhaps in threat.²⁰⁴ According to regional sources, dozens of recently detained JI members trained in MILF camps in Mindanao in the 1990s. Most prominent among them is the bomb expert al Ghozi, who authorities say passed on his knowledge and skill in explosives to MILF operatives. The MILF, in turn, is believed to have ties with al Qaeda through the hundreds of its members that trained in Afghanistan and secured the Afghan fighters' support.²⁰⁵

**Laskar Jihad**

The two Christian populated islands Moluccas and Sulawesi have been continued target of the Indonesian militant group Laskar Jihad. Jafar Umar Thalib who spent several years studying in Pakistan and fighting alongside the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan in the late 1980s founded this organization in 2002. Jafar himself admits to having met Osama bin Laden. Unlike the Osma's concept of Islamic state Jafar is more traditional Muslim but his members adhere to the Wahhabi creed of Islam espoused by Bin Laden. Indonesia

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²⁰⁴ FBI Alerts Allies on Al Qaeda’s Nuclear Plans,” Reuters, March 18, 2002
²⁰⁵ Huang Reyko, “Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia” an article, Terrorism Project Home, Centre for Defence Information, 1779 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20036-2109
has been fighting the Islamic insurgency in this area for a long time and fight between the two communities seems to be never ending.

Jafar acknowledges that his group has ties with Malaysia-based *Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia* (KMM). Indonesia’s National Intelligence Agency also claims to have evidence that Al-Qaeda fighters have been fighting on Sulawesi Island, where hundreds of Laskar members recently arrived to mount assaults on Christians. Furthermore, Laskar Jihad has evidently received money from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Libya and Afghanistan based terrorist operators a report that matches Jafar’s claim that he visited countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Yemen to discuss his mission. The emerging Al-Qaeda connections aside, Laskar Jihad continues to be a concern for the Indonesian government as it mediates peace talks between Muslims and Christians on the troubled islands. With over 10,000 fighters, Laskar Jihad is the largest and most organized militant Muslim organization in Indonesia. It incited conflict on the eastern Indonesian islands in 2000 when it sent around 5,000-armed militia to the Moluccas region with the mission of quelling what it sees as Christian separatist movements. Laskar Jihad’s classification of Christians there as *kafir harbi* or belligerent infidels, the most dangerous category of non-Muslims gives them the religious legitimacy to kill. Since its inception, the group has been blamed for the death of thousands and for the creation of massive refugee flows out of targeted cities.

Maintaining a dual policy Laskar Jihad proclaims a peaceful three-part mission: social work with Quranic education and “security mission.” Jafar initially recruited people from poorer and uneducated segments of the population, and gives remuneration to many fighters in the Moluccas. The group fulfills its social mission by providing medicine and food to refugees and teaching the Koran to Muslims. However, when tasked to fight Christians, many volunteers have said they felt deceived because they had joined to assist in humanitarian activities. When they sought to return home, leaders threatened to kill members who refused to fight against Christians.

Indonesia has been slow and hesitant to the war against the Islamic terrorism. When US revealed the reports about the assassination plan by Al-Faruq and aids, most of the
leaders protested openly and some of them even warned the US about the dire consequences. President Megawati deals with the need to back the United States while maintaining Islamic support at home, and to stringently crack down on terrorists while upholding democratization. In this regard Laskar Jihad is no exception to Jakarta’s list of terrorist groups but the matter is confounded by the group’s oblique but well-known link with the Indonesian military (TNI). Jakarta’s hands-off policy with TNI, which is now under civilian control after decades of dictatorship ended with Suharto, has enabled generals to retain old links with radical group such as Laskar Jihad. The support, the militant group continues to receive from the highest levels of the Indonesian military ensures its survival. Sympathizers within TNI are believed to provide the group with cash, and possibly arms, and to order Moluccan officials not to crack down on Laskar Jihad members. According to Western intelligence sources, Laskar Jihad was actually founded with covert backing of military hardliners who wished to destabilize the post-Suharto reformist government of Abdurrahman Wahid. Jafar branded former President Wahid as anti-Islamic, claiming that his government was “positioned to oppress Muslim interests and protect those of the infidels.”

Though Laskar Jihad claims to raise most of its funds from Muslim communities, it is also believed to be relying heavily on money embezzled from the Army. Western intelligence has confirmed that at least $9.3 million has been transferred from the Army’s main fighting section to the militant group.206

In the past three months, the government has mediated the landmark peace agreements between Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas and the Suwalesi. However, advancing concerns over the TNI’s ties to the group, Laskar Jihad representatives were markedly absent from the negotiating table. Since the group is widely seen to be the prime perpetrators of the ongoing violence on these islands, the durability of the peace deal remains to be seen. On the Moluccas, Laskar fighters mounted renewed violence when its radio station, the Voice of Maluku Muslim Struggle (SPMM) was banned following the

206 Ibid
peace deal. In the Sulawesi, the 7,000 Laskar fighters far outnumber the 2,000 or so police and army troops there — a foreboding presence amidst the push for peace. 207

**FPI (Front Pembela Isalm) or Defenders of Islam**

Al-Habib Muhammad Rizieq bin Hussein Syihab, leader of the pro-Suharto radical Muslim group FPI (Defenders of Islam), and his hardcore members were arrested by the police, after two years of apparent immunity from the process of law and order. The FPI comprising 600 strong hardcore Muslims have been involved in subversive activities for the last two years. They have victimized several of the capital's nightspots or what they think unethical according to Islamic law. 208 The authority kept mum as it feared with more violent attacks from such groups mostly based in Java. Radical Islamic groups continuously voicing resentment toward perceived threats to Islam. 209 The movement was founded in 1998, and is said to be funded by rich anti-reformist generals intent on protecting the vested interests of the elite. A keystone of the FPI demands is also reformation of Islam by imposing *shari'ah* in Indonesia, in an attempt to appeal to fellow Muslim citizens. Most of their followers are from the lower strata of society, poorly educated and usually unemployed. Wielding vicious homemade spears they head everywhere, the FPI forces of repression were earlier ill received by a reformation movement determined to fight. Nowadays though, when these white-robed "warriors" go on the march, most civilians get out of the way. Just prior to the latest attacks, the hard-liners toured Central Jakarta in a convoy of vehicles, bawling and screaming aggression, and even the police admitted they were unable to stem the violence because they were outnumbered. Seeing the majority of the Muslims in Indonesia, these hard-line groups make up only one percent of the total population of the country. However, numerous such groups are emerging slowly which can affect country intensely.

Mainstream Indonesian Muslims also fear a new secular Indonesia that would take away the right of their religion. Al-Habib and his radical Islamic FPI, on the other hand, which

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207 Ibid
208 *The Jakarta Post*, 12 October 2002
209 *The Jakarta Post*, 22 May 2002
wishes to see Indonesia become a theocratic state and has proclaimed *jihad* to protect Muslim "values", harbors vicious views that can again pose a threat to the secularity of Indonesia. Two months after Megawati was sworn in as the fifth President last year, Al-Habib was interviewed by a local media and he states:

"When a policy is issued to castrate the rights of FPI, or oppress Muslim people, we will fight. So, we warn the government not to try to oppress Muslims. As long as they do not, FPI will have no reasons to act. But if the government acts against Muslims, then we will take real action! So, we will watch the behavior of the government. You can say that FPI is practicing social control towards Megawati government and the policies it makes. So we would like to warn the present government under Megawati. Don't mess with Muslim people or try to oppress them! We will be watching! This is a warning!"\(^2{10}\)

Though the FPI members have waged a relentless campaign of destruction of property owned by those according to them are sinners. The FPI portrays the religion as a violent and fierce creed, and demonstrations and violent behavior only tarnish the image of Islam. Confiscating alcohol, smashing nightclub, windows, and security posts, accosting people, shaving the heads of women, and other acts of intimidation have nothing in common with believers of any faith. The demonstrators say they are acting on behalf of Islam, so it is fair to ask how they interpret the Islamic religion, which teaches the virtues of wisdom, patience and mutual respect, by showing their disrespect for the law and for the authorities. They want to show their antipathy toward immoral activities, but they fail to convince that they are of high morals themselves, or that they have any respect for the law. Further adverse publicity and any perception of unrestrained Islamism of the sort Suharto so carefully caged will set Indonesia even further back on the road to economic recovery. Continued weakness in law enforcement against Muslims who are committing

\(^{210}\) See *The Jakarta post FPI*, from 23 February to 29th February 2002
such offenses threatens the growth of even more Islamic extremism and even a potential economic collapse that would destabilize the entire region.

**Moro Islamic Liberation Front**

MILF as they claim their movement as a *jihadi* group but the majority of Filipino consider it as a mere domestic separatist movement. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in southern Philippines is now in the limelight for possible connection to Al-Qaeda and for being an organ in the expansive association of terrorists in Southeast Asia who are together looming as a formidable threat to the international community.

According to various reports, hundreds of MILF members from Mindanao trained in Al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, where they also secured strong ties with Bin Laden. In addition, a leader of Indonesia's militant group *Jemaah Islamiah*, who was arrested last month in Manila and is believed to be tied to *al Qaeda*, admitted to having worked as an explosive expert for the MILF. Nine of the 23 Jemaah Islamiah members arrested in December in fact admitted to having trained at MILF camps. For the MILF, the "Balikatan" exercises are serving as an explicit lesson on the serious consequences of any terrorist activity with international connections or targets.

The MILF was a matter of concern for the Philippines government, long before recent discoveries of *al Qaeda* links brought it to the headlines. The rebel group was formed in 1977 when its members broke off from the larger Moro National Liberation Front. With 15,000 members, it is today the largest Islamic separatist group in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia. It seeks to establish an independent Islamic state, and has mounted a series of terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets in the southern Philippines. Its acts of violence led former President Joseph Estrada to pursue an "all-out war" against the MILF, and the fighters in return declared a jihad against the Philippine government in 2000. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has resumed peace talks with the MILF since coming to office, and a cease-fire agreement is currently in place.

*Abu Sayyaf* was founded by Abdurajak Janjalani, an Islamic scholar and *mujahedin* in the Afghan-Soviet war, after he, like the contemporaries that formed his initial recruiting
crop, returned from studies in Saudi Arabia and Libya determined to fulfill the Muslim ideal of an Islamic state. The group first mobilized in August 1991, with the bombing of a ship in Zamboanga harbor and a grenade attack on a performance by Christian missionaries. Attacks on Catholic congregations — hand grenades thrown into churches — attacks on ethnic Chinese and abduction of priests, nuns, and teachers in the Catholic community soon followed.

Abu Sayyaf’s activities were domestic in scope and remained relatively unknown until it blasted out of obscurity with the April 23, 2000, kidnapping at Sipadan. The hostages included several foreigners, and as international journalists flocked to the area, Abu Sayyaf held groups of reporters against their will and demanded ransom. Suddenly, its agenda was thrust onto the world media stage. From then onwards, it operated as an organization with global reach, focusing not only the creation of an independent Muslim state but the founding of a commission to improve the plight of ethnic Filipinos in Malaysia and, eventually, the release of incarcerated World Trade Center bomber Ramsey Yousef, a group ally who trained them in explosives.

In its amorphous stage under Janjalani’s leadership, Abu Sayyaf joined the international network of Islamic militants that received the support of Osama bin Laden. Abu Sayyaf-al Qaeda links are strong. Many of its fighters claim to have trained in Afghanistan, including as many as 20 who were in the graduating class of a Mazar-e Sharif camp in 2001. The titular group leader, Janjalani’s brother, honed his terrorist skills in Libya. Zamboanga City, a Mindanao Islamic hotbed, was frequented by members of al Qaeda. Yet the best indicator of al Qaeda’s influence is the relationship Janjalani forged with Saudi Arabian businessman Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, Bin Laden’s brother-in-law. Khalifa’s network of Islamic charities and university in Zamboanga were both used to bankroll extremists. His main organization, the International Islamic Relief Organization, has an office in Zamboanga, as does a Bin Laden foundation. Abu Sayyaf received training and money funneled through Khalifa’s network. It was during this time of close association with Khalifa and the al Qaeda network that Abu Sayyaf began plotting its two biggest endeavors — assassination of the Pope during a visit to the Catholic Philippines, and a plan to hijack and blow up 12 U.S. civilian airliners in a single day.
After these plans were foiled (by an accidental fire in Ramsey Yousef's apartment), authorities began to see Abu Sayyaf as a major threat to security in the Philippines — and as a true threat to international security particularly in Southeast Asia.

After Janjalani's death during a police confrontation in 1998, the glue of Islamic fundamentalism with which he held the organization together dissolved, and Abu Sayyaf split into three groups and turned mainly to brutal murders and kidnappings. It received an estimated $25 million ransom from Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi to free hostages kidnapped in March 2000. Since kidnapping has proven profitable, Abu Sayyaf has been a group motivated not by ideology but by money. The character of the group has changed as well. Still, about 140 hostages have been taken during their last two years of violent kidnapping sprees (the number held for short terms and for smaller ransoms are not included here; Abu Sayyaf terrorizes the local population with startling regularity) and 16 people have been killed over that time. More than 300 Filipino soldiers have died in the fight to eliminate Abu Sayyaf.

It was estimated at one point that Abu Sayyaf had several hundred active freedom fighters based on Basilan and the two smaller neighboring islands of Sulu and Tawi Tawi. After the sudden influx of Libyan kidnap ransom, the number probably swelled to around 1,200 young men, lured mainly by the attractive salary and armaments. The current strength is widely disputed because of the group's fragmented state. One faction may only have as many as 80 committed fighters remaining, but the strength of both groups together — as well as a fluid support network — is significantly greater. There are even allegations that the network's allure may have infiltrated the military, who, although tasked with eradication of the group, might have benefited from allowing escapes and narrow misses.

Abu Sayyaf's central base is well hidden in the jungle on Basilan's Mohajid Mountains. Measuring only 20 x 40 miles, it is accessible only by ferry from the port city of Zamboanga on Mindanao island and this is surrounded by heavy forest, it is virtually impenetrable. Several Abu Sayyaf group members are accomplished marksmen who can hit targets over long ranges and through varied weather conditions. The group still holds
captive Filipino nurse Ediborah Yap and American missionary couple Martin and Gracia Burnham.\textsuperscript{211}

**GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) Free Aceh Movement**

Indonesia has been fighting the insurgency of GAM for the last 25 years, which has taken more than 10,000 lives so far. Recently Indonesian government has asked Sweden to act against exiled Aceh separatist leader.\textsuperscript{212} The self-exiled Aceh separatist leader Hasan di Tiro, who leads the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), called a three-day strike in Aceh around Indonesian Independence Day on August 17 2002. The rebels set off a series of bombs across the province. Indonesia has taken the initiative to continue the dialogue process with GAM in September but suddenly Hasan and his acolytes called for the general strike. Tiro has been staying in Sweden since 1979. The government has given GAM until early December to drop its demand for independence, to accept autonomy and to take part in a peace dialogue. Recently the insurgents said they would accept an invitation from Swiss-based mediators to a new round of peace talks in Geneva next month with the Indonesian government. Jakarta said it first wanted to clarify the rebels' stand.\textsuperscript{213}

It is rather an insurgent movement that has been threatening the territorial integrity of Indonesia, for almost four decades which sits astride sea-lanes vital for both U.S. commerce and military operations as well as for Indian strategic concerns because of its proximity with the Andaman Nicobar groups of Islands. Aceh is the western-most part of Sumatra where the Islamic character of the population has been mostly pronounced in entire Indonesia.

The Acehnese never fully accepted the Dutch occupation of their isle and intermittently resisted the Dutch occupation from 1873 to 1942. After Second World War, the Acehnese demand for autonomy, expressed by support for a Javanese Islamic rebellion in

\textsuperscript{211} Emily Clark op.cit., p. 5
\textsuperscript{212} The Jakarta Post, 27 August 2002 "Indonesia to urge Sweden to act against exiled Aceh separatist leader"
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid
the 1950s, was partially met by the central government’s acceptance of a "special region" status for the province in 1959. (See the detail in the chapter II) This allowed a higher-than-usual official Indonesian respect for Islamic law and custom, though it did not change central government and foreign control of natural resources. The Free Aceh Movement was formally established in December 1976. It aimed to force Indonesia to accept an independent Islamic state, but was suppressed brutally for a time until it reemerged during the 1980s. By the late 1980s, with GAM having secured a good deal of popular support, the government responded by declaring the province a Military Operations Area and launching Operation Red Net, a counter-insurgency campaign. This led to the deaths of almost 5,000 people till 1998, when the Area designation was removed and operations subsided, however, military operations have continued. A recent report by the U.K.-based TAPOL Human Rights Campaign noted that since the DOM designation was removed, security forces have engaged in "intimidation, overt massacres, “war of attrition... and targeting of civilian activists.” The Indonesian government refused an East Timor-style referendum on the status of the province in late 1999, which resulted in new outbursts of fighting. A cease-fire was implemented in June 2000 that did not stop sustained, low-level violence and both sides are thought to have committed atrocities, including mass murder, and both have a bad public reputation. The International Institute for Strategic Studies currently estimates GAM's armed strength at 2,000-5,000. The security forces deployed for the offensive, which the International Crisis Group has estimated to be between 25-30,000, have shrunk GAM's control over the province - according to GAM sources themselves - to 30-40 percent continuously, compared to 60-70 percent a year earlier. Intermittent discussions between GAM and the Indonesian government have not led to lasting agreements before this year. A meeting was held between the two sides in Geneva on Feb. 2-3, 2002, and they agreed to discuss a political solution. However, for Indonesia, military action is still the predominant tool, though


217 International Crisis Group, op. cit., p.2
"special autonomy", which is intended to assuage Acehnese grievances, is slowly being put in place. Unlike East Timor, international support for self-determination is not sufficient for Aceh to see independence. Thus some kind of internal autonomy seems the best hope for a final political solution. Yet such autonomy will hardly be practical without reforms to the Indonesian bureaucracy and military that are currently incapable of administering such a sensitive province adequately.\(^{218}\)

However, despite the recent tendency to cling more closely to political and formal Islam, it remains difficult to imagine that Indonesia would and could be transformed into an Islamic state. The new trends could be very alarming for those who are concerned with the nation’s future of democracy. Yet a number of factor are at work that make the realization of the various agendas of political Islam in Indonesia very uniquely. Any discussion of Muslim politics should avoid sweeping generalizations. The scholar Rover Hefner has argued that there is no single, civilization-wide pattern of Muslim politics, but a variety of competing organizations and ideals.\(^{219}\)

Hefner wrote in his 1999 book that the modern era’s nation-making and market globalization have, if anything, only increased the pluralism and contestation of politics in the Muslim world. Thus the most significant “Clash of cultures” that between distinct civilizations, but between rival political traditions within the same Islamic country. The contest and rivalry among a variety of Islamic political traditions are becoming increasingly complex with the contemporary Islamic revival. The “revival of religion” including Islam—that has swept many parts of the globe over at least the last two decades has revived old debates on the relationship between Islam and politics. Both at the theoretical and practical levels Muslims intellectuals, scholars, ulema and leaders have been entangled in such issues as the compatibility or incompatibility between Islam and contemporary ideas and practices of democracy, civil society and human rights.

\(^{218}\) See a report by Colin Robinson, of Terrorism Project Home, Center for Defense Information, 1779 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20036-2109

Again, there is no single and monolithic answer to these questions. One thing is sure that most Muslims have accepted—albeit tacitly—the modern form of the nation-state. But one can also be sure that there are a great number of differences among Muslims, for instance, over the kind and level of democracy that could be implemented in their respective countries. While Islamic revival is continually gaining momentum, there are signs that many secular nation-states in the Muslim world have failed to deliver on their promises. This failure has not only eroded the credibility of secular regimes in the eyes of an ever-growing number of Muslims, but has also created strong skepticism about the viability of modern nation-states. This is evident from attempts carried out by certain Muslim movements, regarded by many as radicals, such as the Hizb al-Tahrir, Gama'ah Tafkir wa al-Hijrah and other splinter groups of the Ikhwan al-Mulimun, to replace secular regimes and nation-states with the classic model of an “Islamic state” better known as the caliphate (al-khilafah), or in contemporary discourse among these movements, a “universal caliphate”. The proponents of the universal caliphate believe that this kind of Islamic political entity led by a single caliph is the answer and the only solution to resolve Muslim disunity and powerlessness vis-a-vis the Western powers.

The contemporary revival of the idea of a single and universal caliphate, undoubtedly, is very problematic. The idea is mostly based on historical and religious romanticism as well as a misconception of not only the very meaning of the caliphate but also of the historical development of the caliphate itself in the post-Prophet Muhammad period. Supporters of the caliphate have confused and have failed to distinguish between the original and genuine caliphate during the Eighty Guided Caliph (al-khulafa’al-rashidun) period and the despotic monarchies of the Umayyads, Abbasids and the Ottomans. While at least the first two caliphs i.e. Abu Bakar and Umar ibn al-Khattab, were elected on their merits, the subsequent “caliphs” in the post-al-khulafa” al Reashidun period were essentially kings who enjoyed uncontested rights and other privileges over all other Muslims. Therefore, modern thinkers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghabum Abd al-Rahman al-Kawak ibi, Rashid Rids, Sayyid Qutb and Abu al-A’ala al-Maqdudi have all refused to recognize the credibility and legitimacy of those Muslim kings as “caliphs.”
One should be aware, however, that these thinkers proposed different, if not conflicting ideas, on some of the main themes of the caliphate. Al-Kawakibi and Rida, for instance, insisted that the caliph should be an Arab of the Quraish tribe. Al-Mawdudi strongly refutes this idea; to him the caliph should be democratically elected to represent all Muslims based on merit by a special electing body, the Majlis al-shura. He says that the lofty position of the caliph must not be reserved for Arabs, since they have no special privileges over other non-Arab Muslim. But despite all the conceptual and practical problems surrounding the feasibility and viability of the caliphate today and in the new millennium, the idea seems to have continually attracted certain elements of Muslims throughout the world.

In Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, the idea of the caliphate has been promoted by such organizations as Hizb al-Tahrir and Jamaah Tarbiyah at least since the 1990s. Under Suharto, these movements were very careful not to invite the regime to take firm action against their activities. They survived his harsh rule and made themselves more pronounced in the post-Suharto period.

Megawati will survive the challenges posed by Muslim hard-liners. But, at the same time, she could be distracted by their continued threatening approach, which would adversely affect her ability to lead Indonesia toward political stability and economic recovery. The continued violence and unrest in the region, economic turmoil and the scramble for political clout before the elections in 2004, as well as the general lawlessness, all creates a ripe battlefield for those who abuse the law and openly defy the authorities in the name of Islam. At present nothing can be of more importance to Indonesia than the attainment of religious harmony in these multiracial, secular states, whose people find their spiritual strength in various religions and live amid such a diverse cultural tradition. Religious sensitivities, more often than not, have created havoc in the community. Religious and sectarian killings in Ambon and the rest of the Spice Islands have claimed many thousands of lives.

Saleem Kidwai, “Islam and Democracy-1, Legitimacy Derived From Consent of the People”, The Statesman, 29 October 2002