

# **IDSS SEMINAR NOTES**

## **IDSS Seminar on Salafi Expansion, Political Mobilisation and Islamic Radicalism in Post-New Order Indonesia**

**Guest Speaker: Dr. Noorhadi Hasan \***

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### ***Introduction:***

Noorhadi begins by putting across his main point that expression of jihad in Indonesia is not simply a manifestation of religious extremism but also an expression of protest due to marginalisation. He then illustrates briefly the emergence of Muslim paramilitary groups after the fall of Suharto and the beginning of Salafi expansion in Indonesia. After that, he proceeds with his analysis of Laskar Jihad as a case study of a Salafi movement.

Noorhadi clarifies that Salafi in his presentation refers to a specific strand of Salafism – the Wahabi. He acknowledges that this is different from the traditional understanding of Salafi among Muslim scholars.

### ***The rise of Muslim paramilitary groups & the expansion of Salafi movements***

Noorhadi explains that the disappearance of state control after the fall of Suharto regime has resulted in the emergence of various Muslim paramilitary groups. The prominent ones were Fron Pembela Islam (FPI), Laskar Mujahidin and Laskar Jihad. While the first two are still active, Laskar Jihad was disbanded in 2002. Despite the groups attempt to root themselves within Islam, Noorhadi highlights that the rivalry among them is also intense. For example, Laskar Mujahidin could not see eye to eye with Laskar Jihad when both were involved in the Maluku conflict.

Salafi (Wahabi) movement begin in Indonesia as a peaceful non-political movement, which focused on Islamising the society through dakwah (missionary) activities, not politic. But a shift took place because of the rising influence of Saudi Arabia, worldwide Islamic resurgence, rise of Islamic activities in campuses and support of Suharto regime to political Islam during the last decade of his rule.

### ***Inflow of Saudi Arabia's influence***

The rise of Saudi's influence came from local organisations such as Dewan Dakwah Indonesia (Dakwah Council of Indonesia). Saudi Arabia also established an institution known as LIPIA (Institute of Islamic and Arab Studies). The institute is affiliated to one of Saudi's main university and run by Saudis themselves. Many individuals from these institutions then participated in Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union and upon return to Indonesia, they established Salafi oriented foundations such As-Sunnah, Majlis Al-Turath, Al-Sofwa, lajnah Al-Kahiriyah, Al-Rahmah and Wahdah Islamiyah.

### ***Some insights about Indonesian Salafi movement***

Noorhadi observes that the Salafi movements are largely supported by undergraduate, dropouts or graduates with Abangan background. The rank-and-file recruits largely come from those with limited education background, to senior high school or lower from the outskirts of cities or villages.

Their involvement usually begins by attending religious gatherings organised by Salafi groups. From these gatherings, many become reborn Muslims and start to live as a Salafi. They change their names and outlook by wearing turban or growing a beard. They engage in activities with the objective of converting the community to the standard of their community.

Noorhadi suggests that among the main pull factor to the Salafi movement is the resistance identity that it provides. The followers are able to resist the current situation and escape from the “dirty world” through discourses and symbols.

The key teachings of the Salafi, as outlined by Noorhadi, is about returning back to the Quran and the Sunnah (the Prophet’s tradition), tawhid (monotheism), al-wala’ and al-bara’ (allegiance and non-allegiance), impermissibility of hizbiyah (parties), hakimiyah not a fundamental part of the religions (in contrast to Qutb’s view), impermissibility of democracy and jihad.

Based on their understanding on these key issues, the Salafi rejects the likes of Hasan Al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Abu Bakar Baasyir. Groups related to these individuals are seen as practicing hizbiyah in Islam, which is the cause of division among Muslims.

### ***Laskar Jihad and the drama of jihad in Maluku***

The emergence of Laskar Jihad was a result of the expansion of the Salafi in Indonesia. Laskar Jihad identified itself as Salafi because it refused the use of the term Wahabi. It was founded by Jakfar Umar Talib in January 2000 with the objective of mobilising Muslims in defence of their brothers in Maluku from the onslaught of local Christians. This was helped by the post-Suharto period of political instability and freedom. Laskar Jihad took its first form as Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah (Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah Communication Forum). When the Maluku conflict erupted, Jakfar Umar Talib sought fatwa from Saudi scholars on jihad in Maluku. After receiving a reply that legitimised jihad in Maluku, Jakfar launched Laskar Jihad when he viewed that the then Gus Dur’s government has failed to defend the interest of Muslims.

However, Noorhadi viewed that the establishment of Laskar Jihad is viewed by Noorhadi as drama. Noorhadi suggests that to understand the motivation behind Laskar Jihad, one needs to appreciate the rivalry and contestation among various Salafi groups.

Noorhadi says that in the beginning of 1990, conflict and contestation started to appear among key figures of the foundations. One such example cited by Noorhadi was between Jakfar Umar Talib, founder of Laskar Jihad and Abu Nidal from As-Sunnah. Two main sources of differences are ideology and winning over support from Saudi’s Sheikh for legitimacy and financial assistance. Jakfar felt disappointed that although he is popular among the Salafis, he has no access to prominent Saudi donors. He felt that it was not fair that the donations were channelled to others and none to him. In that respect, his move to establish Laskar Jihad and position it as the defender of Muslims in Maluku is viewed

by Noorhadi as a manoeuvre to gain attention. Jakfar also differed with Abu Nidal on the issue of American forces' presence in Saudi Arabia. Unlike Abu Nidal, Jakfar stood behind key Saudi scholars who legitimised their presence. This is viewed by Noorhadi as an attempt by Jakfar to portray himself as the real Salafi.

Noorhadi corrects the view of Laskar Jihad prominence in the Maluku conflict. In reality, Laskar Jihad is not a major player in the Maluku conflict. The groups were disliked by the local Mujahidin and other militia groups. Instead of participating in real combat, the group functioned more in the area of social and community services. The success of Laskar Jihad in mobilising thousands of volunteers also was not primarily because of Jakfar but because of the support of 84 kyais who lead various pesantrens.

The call to fight and kill the Christians in Maluku was none other than Jakfar's rhetoric to serve his hidden motive.

The change of local and political scene has caused Jakfar to pronounce the disbandment of Laskar Jihad in 2002. At local level, the ascension of Megawati to presidency and the rise of liberal Islam have changed the elite and public support towards radical groups like Laskar Jihad. The need for its presence in Maluku was also diminished due to the Malino agreement. But the least known reason was the conflict within Laskar Jihad itself. After experiencing jihad in the Maluku, many followers of the group viewed that the involvement in the Maluku as a black spot in their life. Laskar Jihad was seen as deviating from the Salafi teachings. For example, the group was viewed as contradicting the impermissibility of hizbiyah commonly held by the Salafi. Noorhadi reports that Jakfar now is isolated and alone.

### ***Discussion/Q&A***

- **Research Methodology**

Noorhadi says that he spent one and the half-year to research on Laskar Jihad. He went to the Maluku and interviewed various parties. In the process, he was only guided by his own feeling.

- **Difference between his findings and the ICG report on Salafism in Indonesia**

Noorhadi claims that the ICG report did not make findings on the reason of conflict between Jakfar and Abu Nidal and Al-Jawwaz from Pesantren Al-Irsyad.

- **The meaning of drama**

Noorhadi asserts that jihad became a drama in the case of Laskar Jihad because it is used to instigate emotion and to attract attention of the public only. It was a means used by Jakfar to prove his capability and influence.

- **Political Islam**

Noorhadi views that political Islam is an attempt to put Islam in the centre of the society. It is the interplay of religion and politic after the defeat of Arab countries by Israel in 1967. From the beginning, political Islam is political in nature. The rise of political Islam is also related to the rise of the Salafi.

- **How the Salafis are organised?**

Noorhadi observes that the Salafis in exclusivity whether in an exclusive village or restricting interaction among themselves with a sheikh in the centre.

- Objectives of Laskar Jihad and Laskar Mujahidin

Noorhadi agrees that Laskar Jihad's objectives were symbolic and Laskar Mujahidin's objective was operational – to fight the Christians.

***Conclusion:***

Noorhadi concludes that that his research proves that jihad could be used as a tool for Muslims to enter public sphere and also a form of public mobilisation and social movement.

Recorded by:

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