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After Noordin Top: What Next for Indonesia?

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Following the death of Noordin Mohammed Top and his close associates, what are challenges remaining in the battle against terrorism in Indonesia?

THE INDONESIAN police have done their job well in countering terrorism. Nothing captures this better than the killing of Noordin Mohammed Top, the most wanted Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) fugitive, and his associates. However, challenges remain as extremists can still preach freely in Indonesia's democratic environment. For instance, Abu Bakar Bakar Bashir – the former JI emir -- and some of his associates preach in a number of major mosques in Jakarta.

Similar messages are also delivered by other hardline Muslim clerics in several other mosques across Indonesia. The preaching is supported by the increasing availability of jihadi books in main bookstores in Indonesia as well on the Internet. All of this continues to fuel the ideology that allows groups such as JI to replenish itself. The police are not the primary weapon in defeating ideas; this has to come from the government but most importantly the wider Muslim community.

Government's Struggle against Radical Ideology

Countering radical ideology is not new in Indonesia. The police have a programme to de-radicalise ideologically-motivated detainees though the results have been mixed. Some prominent JI leaders and members such as Nasir Abas have been successfully deradicalised. However, some cases such as that of Urwah alias Bagus Budi Pranoto, proved otherwise. Urwah, who was once jailed for three and a half years for his involvement in the 2004 Australian bombing, re-joined Noordin's group upon servicing his sentence, and was later killed along with Noordin in the police raid on 17 September.

The Indonesian government fully recognises the need to counter radical ideology in the larger society. Recently President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono mentioned that part of his effort to prevent terrorism is by stepping up religious education. It implies that anti-radical content in religious education in schools is very important in the fight against radical ideology. This is especially so given the fact that members of the young generation are being recruited by the terrorist network. The case of Dani Dwi

Permana, a teenager who became a suicide bomber for the 17 July J.W. Marriott bombing in Jakarta, has alarmed both the government and society..

Some government initiatives are the Ministry of Home Affairs' *tour de pesantren* in 2004, to promote nationalist ideology to pesantren students. In the latest development, the Jakarta Chief Regional Police cooperated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Muslim organisation, to brief 1,000 teachers and high school students on misconceptions about jihad. However, the programme seems to be ad-hoc and therefore should be developed into a continuous long term one. Another problem is that of coordination. There is difficulty in coordinating law enforcement agencies and the various ministries – the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Depag) and Police amongst others – let alone incorporating Muslim civic organisations.

For instance, monitoring religious outreach (*dakwah*) was one of the police's options to prevent future terrorist attacks. But when publicly suggested following the twin Jakarta hotel bombings in July 2009 to supplement action against clerics preaching violence, it was quickly criticised by many Muslims organisations. The statement was later corrected by the head of Indonesian police himself, saying that monitoring *dakwah* was the domain of the Depag. Still, the prospect for more cooperation between the two government agencies is there as the Depag has affirmed it will take action against clerics preaching violence and would ask for police help if necessary.

On another front in the ideological battle, the government has tried to address the propaganda issue with little success. It used its intelligence agency to prevent the publication and distribution of the *Martyr's Trilogy* books written by the Bali bombers trio (Imam Samudra, Amrozi, and Mukhlas). However, the books are still on sale and advertised, for instance, in one of the jihadi websites. There are regular calls to ban publications and websites, or to arrest clerics who incited violence. While tempting, such calls are rarely heeded. As was seen during Bashir's arrest and trials, Muslim extremists are also adroit at mobilising mass demonstrations which turn trials and bans into propaganda against the state, thus undermining any positive impact of an arrest or ban.

What Should Be Done?

Even though the government has had difficulty in organising a strategic approach, the wider Muslim community has successfully occupied the space unfilled by government efforts. The two largest Muslim organisations – NU and Muhammadiyah – and their affiliated organisations have been playing their roles in speaking for the silent majority of Muslims who do not support the radicals. NU actively organises seminars in countering radical ideology as well as putting related anti-radical news in its frequently-updated website. It has also held a workshop on anti-radical message for teachers of NU pesantrens for dissemination to their students. NU's affiliated NGOs such as The Wahid Institute, established by the former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, is active in promoting religious pluralism and tolerance through its research and seminars. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah Youth in East Java has determined to send hundreds of preachers to the villages in delivering counter-radical message.

It took decades of intensive work for the radicals to reach the position they now have. Capturing the people's hearts and minds in support of moderation will take as long. Counter-efforts cannot be judged by events such as an attack. Success or failure can only be assessed over time. The clearest sign of success is the community's willingness to organise efforts against terrorists and extremists. The fact that NU and Muhammadiyah have done so is a sign that the corner is being turned. But success can only be ensured if there is a coordinated effort amongst all stakeholders. Individual efforts, no matter how effective, will ultimately fail.

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