



**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**
A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

RSIS COMMENTARIES

RSIS Commentaries are intended to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy relevant background and analysis of contemporary developments. The views of the authors are their own and do not represent the official position of the S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced electronically or in print with prior permission from RSIS. Due recognition must be given to the author or authors and RSIS. Please email: RSISPublication@ntu.edu.sg or call (+65) 6790 6982 to speak to the Editor RSIS Commentaries, Yang Razali Kassim.

No. 124/2012 dated 11 July 2012

The Future of Islamism in Indonesia: Neo- or- post- Islamism?

By Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman

Synopsis

The shift of the Prosperity Justice Party (PKS) from traditional Islamism to a more moderate post-Islamist ideology has led to the emergence of neo-Islamist movements. These neo-Islamists are gaining ground within Indonesia by attracting traditional Islamists and younger hardliners, who are seeking to overhaul the Indonesian political system.

Commentary

In his seminal book, *Globalised Islam: A Search for a New Ummah*, the prominent French scholar of political Islam, Olivier Roy argued that Islamist parties are now moving towards a phase of post-Islamism. He described post-Islamism as the privatization of Islamism. In essence Islamic groups have abandoned their traditional goals of forming an Islamic state, implementing Islamic laws and reviving the Caliphate.

Recent political developments following the Arab Spring seem to confirm Prof Roy's assertion. Following democratically-held elections Islamist political parties in Tunisia and Egypt have steered away from Islamist agendas to emphasise their commitment to a corruption-free economy and public welfare programs.

Islamism to Post-Islamism: The Case of the PKS

In Southeast Asia, the main Islamist political party in Indonesia, the Prosperity and Justice Party (PKS), is another example of a political party that has undergone a shift in its ideological stance to post-Islamism. Since its electoral success in 2004, the PKS has adopted a largely post-Islamist stance. The party's success in maintaining its vote share in the 2009 elections convinced leaders that its more moderate stance will ensure the party's success in future elections.

However PKS has remained conservative in some of its stances such as its support for the anti-pornography laws. The party's legislators have also joined other Islamist parties and groups in calling for the banning of the Ahmadiyah sect, largely seen as deviant by Muslims. In the recent spat over the alleged decision of the Indonesian Health Minister to distribute condoms to young Indonesians, the PKS has maintained its opposition to this initiative.

PKS' conservative stance on these issues is however seen to be insufficient. Its decision to cease advocating for an Islamic state in Indonesia was viewed with trepidation by the hardliners within the party. Several of the

party's founding leaders such as Mashadi and Abu Ridho Abdi Sumaiti have left the party citing the party's departure from its Islamist agenda as the key reason for their decision.

The Emergence of the Neo-Islamist groups

The vacuum in the Indonesian Islamist ranks created by the departure of PKS leaders is currently filled by what could be termed as neo-Islamist groups. The neo-Islamists are different from Islamists and post-Islamists in several ways. Neo-Islamists adopt an uncompromising stance on the implementation of Islamic laws and formation of the Islamic state. The neo-Islamists are also unequivocally opposed to the political, economic and social systems in all Muslim countries, and seek to overhaul these systems with their vision of Islamic political, economic and social systems.

A key tenet of the neo-Islamist agenda is to reorient the current world order by replacing it with an Islamic supremacist world order akin to the historical Caliphate. An interesting dimension of neo-Islamism is its focus on a political rather than religious agenda. While Islamists and post-Islamist groups tend to trace their ideology to a more modernist interpretation of Islam as denoted by the Muslim Brotherhood and to a lesser extent Salafis, neo-Islamists are more disparate in their religious orientation. Neo-Islamists can come from more quietist Sufi or puritan Wahhabi affiliations.

The Forum Ummat Islam (FUI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) are two neo-Islamist groups that have become prominent in the Indonesian political scene. HTI is the Indonesian chapter of the transnational movement, Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT). Founded in 1953 by Islamic jurist Taqiuddin An-Nabhani, HT sought to revive the Caliphate in all Muslim countries and lands. HT was brought to Indonesia by an Australian member of the group and is now one of the most prominent religious based movements in Indonesia.

The Forum Ummat Islam is an umbrella organisation comprising 42 Islamist/Islamic organisations including groups such as the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI). Both the HTI and FUI sought to substitute the Indonesian political system with an Islamic state through a peaceful revolution. Ultimately, the groups are advocating the formation of a Caliphate through a union of all Islamic countries.

The Growth of the Neo-Islamist groups

In recent years, HTI and FUI have seen a growth in their religio-political influence. Many young Indonesian Islamists who are tired of the perceived compromises made by the PKS are now turning to these neo-Islamist groups. This could be seen from HTI's dominance of the Islamic student scene in the leading Indonesian universities. FUI has also served as a conduit for Islamists who are disillusioned by PKS' post-Islamist turn. Mashadi, a founding member of PKS became the founding chairman of FUI after leaving PKS.

The neo-Islamist groups were in the forefront of pressurising the Indonesian government to proscribe the Ahmadiyah, widely seen as a threat to Indonesian Islam. They mounted a campaign against the Ahmadiyah through strong lobbying of parliamentarians as well as officials in the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In essence, the neo-Islamists were astute in building important networks within the government resulting in the formation of a parliamentary commission to examine the issue. This issue gained the neo-Islamists widespread support amongst Indonesian Muslims.

Another example of the neo-Islamists' expanding influence is their involvement in the Indonesian presidential elections. Prior to the 2009 presidential elections, the neo-Islamist groups once again showed their lobbying strength. Several neo-Islamist leaders including Muhammad Al-Khaththath, the Secretary-General of FUI and Cholil Ridwan, a board member of Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) and founding member of FUI pledged the neo-Islamist support for the presidential team of Jusuf Kalla and Wiranto in exchange for their assurance to ban the Ahmadiyahs if the pair was voted in.

It is likely that the neo-Islamist movements such as HTI and FUI would continue to grow in Indonesia. Their ability to build social capital amongst bureaucrats, government leaders and military leaders will result in their expanding influence. The neo-Islamists groups are likely to attract the bulk of young Islamists who are growing disillusioned with the 'compromises' made by parties like the PKS. This is likely to reshape the political Islam scene in Indonesia.

Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman is an Associate Research Fellow with the Contemporary Islam Program at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.