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Pro-IS Home-Based Schooling in Indonesia

By V. Arianti and Ahmad Saiful Rijal

SYNOPSIS

The community of supporters in Indonesia of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) has been working on the educational front to produce a generation of IS militant "cubs". These cubs are being nurtured in their home-based schools, which remain untouched by the country's laws.

COMMENTARY

IS SUPPORTERS have administered tens of home-based schools, mostly in Java, according to estimates by PAKAR, an Indonesian NGO that studies radicalism in Indonesia. They name the schools *Rumah Qur'an* (RQ), which literally means Qur'anic House. It is technically a "boarding school" run in a house where the students live and study in a cramped environment.

Depending on the capacity of the house, a pro-IS RQ can accommodate eight to two dozen students, either single or mixed genders (segregated) in one compound. How are the schools grooming the potential "cubs" of IS, also known as ISIS?

Assessing the School's Curriculum

Based on the publicly available social media accounts of some pro-IS schools, they offer *tahfidz* (memorising the Qur'an) programmes. However, their curriculum appears to be beyond merely memorising the verses. In essence, the schools offer religious classes with a Salafi curriculum. Two subjects highlighted as core subjects are Arabic language and *Tawhid* (Islamic Monotheism).

According to the posts, Arabic language is important in order to understand the Holy Quran as well as the Prophetic Tradition while *Tawhid* is central to a Muslim's faith. While both subjects are traditionally important for all Muslims, the Salafi doctrinal

orientation emphasises a rigid understanding of *Tawhid* that requires the abolition of all manifestations of *shirk* (polytheism), *bara'* (disassociation) as well as *takfir* (excommunication) of so-called polytheists.

It is important to note that Salafism is not the root cause of terrorism; however for IS, it is pivotal for them to plant the seeds of antagonism towards the 'enemies' of Islam by exploiting certain religious concepts such as the Salafi doctrine of *takfir*.

The latter has been used to legitimise the IS' killing of Muslims as well as others. As a result, IS supporters who run the RQs in Indonesia have co-opted Salafi principles as their correct theological approach to Islam.

“Nullifiers of Islam”

Much has been discussed about the idea of Caliphate espoused by IS and how it has managed to attract fighters across the world, but the concept of 'nullifiers' of Islam legitimises the atrocities that IS has committed against Muslims. This idea forms the basis for IS to isolate and excommunicate Muslims for supposedly not adhering to the 'true' teachings of Islam.

Pro-IS schools have adopted the book titled “Pembatalan Islam” as the core reference for the study of *Tawhid*, the fundamental principle of monotheism in Islam. The book is a translated treatise known as “The Nullifiers of Islam” written by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Islamic doctrine known as Wahhabism.

According to ‘Abd al-Wahhab, as explained by the scholar Shaikh Abdullah an-Najmi, this set of ten nullifiers can invalidate one’s religion and good deeds. If a person commits any one of these nullifiers and his good deeds become void, he will be relegated to the rank of unbelievers. One of the nullifiers notes that “Whoever does not excommunicate the polytheists, or is doubtful about their unbelief, or affirms the validity of their doctrine – he is an unbeliever by consensus”.

Among the posts by the home-based pro IS schools, one argues that parents who love their children should let them study *Tawhid* instead of Mathematics, English and National Civic Education. This is because they are the next generation of *Muwahhid* (monotheist). This term *Muwahhid* has been used by IS in its propaganda videos as well as publications. It refers to those who not just profess God’s unity but also those who perform jihad against the enemies.

In another post, a screenshot of a related WhatsApp group highlighted the achievement of some students who have completed several topics on *Tawhid* based on a booklet called “Alwaajibat” (the obligatory upon Muslims), also written by ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. The post mentioned that it is imperative to educate the young against the polytheistic peril of modern times – such as democracy and other forms of political systems which do not recognise Sharia law. Such posts have garnered a lot of ‘likes’ and ‘comments’ among its followers.

Slowing Growth of Militant ‘Cubs’

The number of pro-IS home-based schools will likely grow as the administrators aim

to establish more such schools across the country. Law enforcement agencies are not able to arrest such growth as the administrators of the schools are not technically involved in terror acts.

The home-based pro-IS schools have attracted both parents who are supporters of IS and parents in the local neighbourhood who are not IS supporters. Just as parents involved in Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the largest jihadi group in Indonesia, enrol their children to study at JI schools, IS parents and supporters would see such schools as important institutions to instil IS values in their children.

Moreover, children of the pro-IS followers who are detained and slain pro-IS militants are sponsored by pro-IS charity groups when they go to such schools. For the unsuspecting non-IS parents, who live in the vicinity of a pro-IS school, they may be enticed by the school's claim that it offers the "true" teachings of Islam.

To slow the creation of a new generation of militant 'cubs', more needs to be done to stem the growth of such schools if they purvey values that are antithetical to the security of the country. The Indonesian government and civil society organisations could mitigate it by first, ensuring that the children of radical inmates and slain militants do not study at those schools.

This would help to stop the cycle of radicalism within IS families. Second, there should be general education within the community about such schools, especially among unsuspecting parents who merely want a religious education for their children.

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