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**Islam and Violence in Malaysia**

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## ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, violence related to Islam has been the exception rather than the rule. Aversion towards violence among Malaysian Muslims traces its roots to a multi-religious polity. The state has, however, been driven a few times into coercive action by the occurrence of actual or threat of potential violence. This paper chronicles the few cases of violence which have intermittently driven a wedge between Islamists and the state, which harbours its own vision of a modern Islamic polity. It argues that there is thin evidence to support a posited relationship between Islam and violence. Despite recent security scares related in one way or another to imagined or actual Islamic groups in the 'war against terrorism' era, the possibility of an Islamic state emerging in Malaysia via militant means remains remote.

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# ISLAM AND VIOLENCE IN MALAYSIA

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the new millennium, there has been a remarkable rise in the use or threatened use of violence by terrorist groups in Southeast Asia, as a means to achieve their goals. The pattern of such terrorism has shifted from traditional terrorism - comprising armed political groups fighting for secession from a particular nation state or seeking an overthrow of its government and its forcible replacement by those who share similar ideological visions with the terrorists; to new or post-modern terrorism - consisting of transnational groups supporting wider religio-political aims. Post-modern terrorism is further distinguished by its perpetrators' ability to exploit sophisticated advances in information and communications technology and economic globalisation to their own advantage, while simultaneously adopting fairly pre-modern orientations such as amorphous millenarianism and heartless approval of militant brutality.<sup>1</sup> The proliferation of new terrorism in Southeast Asia, especially evident since the commercial aeroplane hijacks and suicide attacks on the World Trade Centre (WTC) in New York and the Pentagon in the United States of America (USA) on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 (hereafter '9-11'), have arguably caught the region's governments by surprise. Their complacency was generated by consecutively high rates of economic growth, a stout policy of non-interference in the affairs of fellow Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member's affairs, and a false sense

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Tan, 'The "New Terrorism": How Southeast Asia Can Counter It' in Uwe Johannsen, Alan Smith and James Gomez (eds.), *September 11 & Political Freedom: Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2003), pp. 86-88.

of over-confidence in the capacity of Asian Values to inculcate a shared vision of regional harmony.<sup>2</sup>

Among Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia is arguably the least experienced in handling threats posed by terrorism, having undergone only one nationwide armed rebellion - that of the Communist Party of Malaya, from 1948 until 1989.<sup>3</sup> In its display of peaceful methods and broad agreement to operate within the Malaysian state's socio-political system, Islamic resurgence in Malaysia is distinguished from its corresponding Middle Eastern phenomenon, which has regularly experienced militant upsurges by myriad groups of Islamic rebels. Since its inception in the middle to late 1970s, the catchphrase to describe Islamic resurgence in Malaysia has been *dakwah* – implying the peaceful propagation of the message of Islam as *din al-hayah* (The Way of Life) to fellow Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Until fairly recently, Islamic-related violence in Malaysia has been relatively rare. Whatever violence that has occurred has been the exception rather than the rule. The machinations of the groups involved in the violence, moreover, far from reflect a systematic attempt at armed insurrection bearing realistic hopes of success. This was proven by the security forces' swift crackdown on the two main violent uprisings of the post-Islamic resurgence era, viz, the Memali incident of November 1985 and the Al-Ma'unah affair of July 2000. These cases, and their doctrinal origins, will be discussed later in the paper. Both the Memali and Al-Ma'unah rebels were among the twelve militant groups identified by the Home Ministry as having attempted or planned a violent takeover of the country's administration since 1967.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith, 'Southeast Asia and the War Against Terrorism: The Rise of Islamism and the Challenge to the Surveillance State' in Uwe Johannsen, Alan Smith and James Gomez (eds.), *September 11 & Political Freedom: Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2003), pp. 143-147.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Andrew Tan, 'The "New Terrorism": How Southeast Asia Can Counter It', pp. 91-92.

<sup>4</sup> '12 kumpulan militan mahu guling kerajaan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 26 September 2003.

Despite such incidences, only just before 9-11 has Malaysia seriously awakened to the possibility of a large-scale terrorist uprising. What seemed a remote possibility was transformed into a real one with the discovery in 2001 of revolutionary cells run by the the *Mujahidin* Group of Malaysia (KMM – *Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia*, or otherwise popularly sensationalised in the media as *Kumpulan Militan Malaysia*), followed by a crackdown on Malaysian cells of the *Jamaah Islamiah* (JI), KMM's Southeast Asian equivalent. Both KMM and JI, in turn, allegedly operated links with the Al-Qaeda international terrorist network. The sense of urgency to monitor potential terrorist groups has been heightened by revelations that the USA maintains close interest on the terrorist threat emanating from Southeast Asia,<sup>5</sup> and has even included Malaysian groups in its list of undesirable terrorists.<sup>6</sup> Partly in response to such concerns, Malaysia has initiated anti-terrorist measures which have focused on identifying and addressing the deep-seated causes of terrorism, rather than relying on military strikes against suspected terrorists and countries accused of harbouring terrorism. Strongly believing in multilateral cooperation among Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia has since late 2003 hosted the Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), which actively organises seminars and workshops on combating terrorism. It is important that such measures are seen to be effective by Western nations who, it is feared, may choose to interfere in the domestic affairs of Southeast Asian countries should their anti-terrorist defence mechanisms prove ineffectual.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 'The elusive enemy: The second front in America's war on terror is yielding limited results', *The Economist*, 1 August 2002; 'War on terror in Southeast Asia a potential minefield', *The Sun*, 19 August 2002; 'Amerika sokong Howard -- Rancangan Australia serang negara jiran dalam usaha buru pengganas', *Utusan Malaysia*, 4 December 2002; 'AS sasar Asia Tenggara', *Utusan Malaysia*, 5 June 2004.

<sup>6</sup> 'AS senarai Al-Ma'unah `pengganas ditegah', *Utusan Malaysia*, 8 December 2001; 'KMM, JI dalam senarai pengganas Amerika', *Utusan Malaysia*, 2 May 2003.

<sup>7</sup> cf. 'Britain hormati pendekatan Malaysia perangi keganasan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 11 January 2003; 'Cara Malaysia perangi keganasan disokong', *Utusan Malaysia*, 14 January 2003; 'AS puji Malaysia

## 2. ISLAMIC-RELATED VIOLENCE WITHIN THE FORMATIVE STAGES OF ISLAMIC RESURGENCE IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia's success in maintaining peace and stability, amidst the simmering Islamic resurgence of the 1970s-1990s, was the result of effective state-designed manoeuvres by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's administration, intended to neutralise rather than punish resurgent Muslims. The challenges posed by such Islamic movements as the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM – *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*), the opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS – *Parti Islam SeMalaysia*), and the Islamic Representative Council (IRC) which later evolved into the Organisation for Islamic Reformation (JIM – *Jemaah Islah Malaysia*),<sup>8</sup> were managed by a shrewd policy of Islamisation and cooptation of Islamists combined with controlled repression.<sup>9</sup> Rather than being shunned and having their views dismissed, resurgent Muslims were accommodated via limited opportunities to air demands and grievances. Short of playing into their hands, the state cooperated with them where possible, but maintained control of the overall situation. In contrast, the emergence of terrorist cells in the heartlands of the Muslim world could in part be located to the state's uncompromising response, sometimes unnatural and out of proportion, to resurgent Muslims who demanded a say in the running of society. Intolerance breeds

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perangi keganasan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 6 February 2004; 'SEARCCCT berjaya tangani keganasan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 2 June 2004; 'Amerika yakin keupayaan Malaysia tangani keganasan', *Berita Harian*, 22 June 2004; 'PM ajak ikut cara Malaysia menanganai keganasan', *Berita Harian*, 1 April 2005.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of the organisational structure and methods practised by ABIM, PAS and IRC aka JIM, see Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'The Maturation of *Dakwah* in Malaysia: Divergence and Convergence in the Methods of Islamic Movements in the 1990s', *IKIM Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2003), pp. 59-97.

<sup>9</sup> David Camroux, 'State Responses to Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia: Accommodation, Co-option and Confrontation', *Asian Survey*, vol. 36, no. 9 (1996), pp. 852-868.



violence, which invites even harsher repercussions from the authorities. Society and politics are then stuck in a culture of fear and constant threats of reprisal by both the state and Muslim insurgents.

In terms of actual Islamic-related violence in Malaysia, the number of incidents is small. The eruption of sporadic violence did not originate from the mainstream efforts of the major *dakwah* movements, but was rather associated with fifth-column activities of fringe Islamic groups, whose ideological outlook was invariably extremist and theologically suspect. By the late 1970s, the government was expressing serious concern that undesirable foreign elements, allegedly from the Indian sub-continent and Libya, were successfully misleading young Malay-Muslims into embracing extremist forms of Islam which were intolerant of other religions.<sup>10</sup> As early as 1976, Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah had warned of foreign powers which used missionary organisations as "*tools to penetrate the Malay community*" and "*ultimately lead them to communism.*"<sup>11</sup> Prior to assuming the Premiership in July 1981, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad had reportedly warned of "*Malay religious opportunists*" seeking to topple the government via violent means.<sup>12</sup> Government spokesmen also accused the communists, operating through front organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood Association (PAPERI: *Persatuan Persaudaraan Islam*) supposedly active in Kelantan, as the elusive nemesis constantly prepared to exploit foreign-induced divisions among the Malays.<sup>13</sup> According to Musa Ahmad, the former Communist

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<sup>10</sup> See the exclusive report by Rodney Tasker, 'The explosive mix of Muhammad and modernity', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 February 1979.

<sup>11</sup> *New Straits Times*, 15 May 1976, as quoted in Simon Barraclough, 'Managing the Challenges of Islamic Revival in Malaysia: A Regime Perspective', *Asian Survey*, vol. 23, no. 8 (1983), p. 961.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Tan, 'The "New Terrorism": How Southeast Asia Can Counter It', p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Barraclough, 'Managing the Challenges of Islamic Revival in Malaysia: A Regime Perspective', p. 961. It must be mentioned, however, that apart from confessions made under duress, the government has presented little, if any, concrete evidence that mainstream Islamic movements had been subject to communist infiltration, as its exaggerated propaganda consistently implied. See also Simon Barraclough, 'The Dynamics of Coercion in the Malaysian Political Process', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1985), p. 803.

Party of Malaya (CPM) chairman who surrendered to the authorities in 1981, the CPM had resolved since 1961 that religion provided the best avenue of obtaining mass support. As such, the CPM had sought to infiltrate religious organisations through highly trained cadres who would use leadership positions to spread communism, under the guise of religious extremism, among rank and file members. Musa also disclosed CPM's tactics of playing up religious and nationalistic sentiments to attract Malay intellectuals.<sup>14</sup>

Since 1979, state rhetoric against alleged foreign involvement in Islamic movements has focused upon Iran's conscious attempt to export its revolution abroad. The manifest excitement surrounding Islamists of all persuasions after the February revolution prompted the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Mohamad Nasir, to declare: "*The struggle of the Iranian people has nothing to do with our country.*"<sup>15</sup> ABIM's decision to observe a 'Solidarity Day' in conjunction with the liberation of Iran and its leader Anwar Ibrahim's cordial visits to Khomeini's Iran and 'fundamentalist' Pakistan under Zia ul-Haq seemed to vindicate accusations of ABIM's predilection for a revolutionary Islamic government.<sup>16</sup> During the 1980 and 1981 General Assemblies of the ruling coalition's chief Malay component party, UMNO (United Malays' National Organisation), vociferous attacks against groups "*attempting to import the Iranian revolutionary ideology*" were followed by specific demands by some delegates to proscribe ABIM altogether.<sup>17</sup> Also alleged to have links with Gadhaffi's Libya,

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<sup>14</sup> Leonard C. Sebastian, 'Ending an Armed Struggle Without Surrender: The Demise of the Communist Party of Malaya (1979-89) and the Aftermath', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1991), p. 276, 294: fn. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Bintang Timur*, 13 August 1979, as quoted in Syed Ahmad Hussein, *Islam and Politics in Malaysia 1969-82: The Dynamics of Competing Traditions* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, New Haven, 1988), p. 585.

<sup>16</sup> Mohamad Abu Bakar, 'Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia', *Asian Survey*, vol. 21, no. 10 (1981), p. 1048.

<sup>17</sup> Syed Ahmad Hussein, *Islam and Politics in Malaysia 1969-82: The Dynamics of Competing Traditions*, pp. 585-586.

ABIM nevertheless denied receiving finance from abroad.<sup>18</sup> The question of funding aside, it was ABIM's aggressive commitment to Islamic internationalism and success in winning praise from Muslim countries and international Islamic bodies, as signified by Anwar Ibrahim's appointment as the Asia-Pacific representative to the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), that made it a cause for legitimate concern.<sup>19</sup>

As for PAS, Iranian influence was discernible in the language of its post-1982 rhetoric, for instance the portrayal of its struggle as representing the *mustazaffin* (oppressed) as against the *mustakbirin* (oppressors).<sup>20</sup> PAS-sponsored schools were known to have sent their graduates to Iranian universities for further studies.<sup>21</sup> But contrary to the government's claims, no evidence exists to indicate that PAS-Iran relations ever went beyond ideological and educational aspects. Charges of Iranian interference in Malaysian politics peaked at the height of the government's coercive measures against PAS in the mid-1980s. In his 1984 National Day address, Dr. Mahathir harped upon the theme of groups aiming to forcibly establish a "*government by mullahs*" and on another occasion, claimed to have seen evidence of PAS's plans of setting up 'suicide squads' for whom "*the shedding of UMNO blood [wa]s halal.*"<sup>22</sup> The government attempted to reduce movements' international links not only through

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<sup>18</sup> Judith Nagata, 'Religious Ideology and Social Change: The Islamic Revival in Malaysia', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1980), p. 430; John Funston, 'Malaysia' in Mohammed Ayoob (ed.), *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 176; Geoffrey C. Gunn, 'Radical Islam in Southeast Asia: Rhetoric and Reality in the Middle Eastern Connection', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1986), p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> John Funston, 'Malaysia', p. 176; Mohamad Abu Bakar, 'Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia', p. 1048.

<sup>20</sup> See for example PAS President Haji Yusof Rawa's keynote address entitled 'Ke Arah Pembebasan Ummah' (Towards Emancipation of the Ummah), delivered at the 29<sup>th</sup> PAS General Assembly on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1983, in Haji Yusof Rawa and Ustaz Haji Fadzil Mohd Noor, , *Membina Ketahanan Ummah: Koleksi Ucapan Dasar Muktamar Tahunan Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) 1983-1994* (Kepala Batas: Dewan Muslimat, 1995), pp. 3-42, cf. Jomo Kwame Sundram and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, 'The Politics of Malaysia's Islamic Resurgence', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1988), p. 862; Farish A. Noor, *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS (1951-2003) Volume 2* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 2004), pp. 329-336, 355.

<sup>21</sup> 'Fundamentalism on trial', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 May 1986.

<sup>22</sup> 'They shall not Pas: Umno challenges the opposition over who is more Islamic than whom', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 October 1984.

closer supervision, but also by sowing contacts with countries suspected of assisting them, such that funds to promote the cause of *dakwah* were channeled only through government-approved outlets.<sup>23</sup> Malaysia took definite steps to rival *dakwah* movements' international Islamic credentials by improving economic and cultural ties with the Islamic world.<sup>24</sup> That Iran appeared to accept the danger that close ties with radical Islamic elements posed to its diplomatic relations with Malaysia, as reported in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (9 August 1984), was testimony to the success of the state's strategy of neutralising the international influence of *dakwah* movements.

The state's surveillance of activities of fringe Islamic extremists intensified after bloody incidents in Kerling, Selangor in 1978 and Batu Pahat, Johore in 1980. In the former case, temple vigilantes butchered five young Malay-Muslims, only one of whom survived, who were a self-professed mission to desecrate Hindu shrines. In the latter event, a police station was viciously attacked by twenty sword-brandishing religious zealots, eight of whom were killed in the ensuing confrontation, and had reportedly planned a violent takeover of the country.<sup>25</sup> In March 1980, the Internal Security Act (ISA)<sup>26</sup> was used to arrest several Kedah PAS leaders accused of

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Geoffrey C. Gunn, 'Radical Islam in Southeast Asia: Rhetoric and Reality in the Middle Eastern Connection', p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> 'Lizards and alligators: Mahathir sharpens up Malaysia's foreign policy profile but at a cost of bemusing its island neighbours', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 31 January 1985.

<sup>25</sup> K. Ramanathan, 'Hinduism in a Muslim State: The Case of Malaysia', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1996), pp. 44-45.

<sup>26</sup> The ISA (1960) authorises the Home Minister to detain anybody who "has acted or is about to act or is likely to act in any manner prejudicial to the security of Malaysia;" see ALIRAN, *ISA dan Keselamatan Negara* (Penang: Aliran Kesedaran Negara, 1988), p. 24. The situation has been made worse since June 1989, when an amendment barred judicial review of ministerial or regal actions in the exercise of their discretionary powers under the ISA, hence effectively divesting detainees of their legal right to challenge their detention through *habeas corpus* applications. For purposes of investigation, the detainee is held for a preliminary period of sixty days, which may be followed by a two-year confirmed detention, renewable indefinitely on a two-yearly basis, subject to recommendations from the Special Branch and an appointed Advisory Board. This Board undertakes reviews of cases on a half-yearly basis and, in the absence of a proper legal trial, listens to appeals from detainees. It has, however, been criticised as a superficial measure designed to give a semblance of legitimacy to the system; its recommendations are often ignored, it does not guarantee the right to representation by a counsel, and even when such a right is granted, the rule of confidentiality between lawyers and clients has been openly flouted; see John A. Lent, 'Human Rights in Malaysia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1984), pp. 443-444. Upon release, detainees may be further imposed with a restriction order,

mobilising thousands of paddy farmers in mass demonstrations demanding rises in the price of rice and payments of subsidies in cash. Despite the obvious economic overtones of the unrest, the government insisted that it was masterminded by a clandestine organisation, *Pertubuhan Angkatan Sabilullah* (Organisation of the Soldiers of God), intent upon erecting an Islamic government by revolutionary means; an allegation apparently corroborated by the confession of one of the detainees after weeks of interrogation.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the 1980s, several fringe groups suspected of para-military activities, bearing such names as the Islamic Revolutionary Forces, the Spiritual Group and the Crypto were uncovered and their leaders arrested under the ISA.<sup>28</sup> Actual outbursts of violence, or evidence of intended attempts, provided justification for the government's tightening of security measures and enabled it to discredit the mainstream *dakwah* movements by lumping Islamists together as 'fanatics', 'deviant extremists' and proponents of *dakwah songsang*.<sup>29</sup>

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which effectively confines their movements within a designated locality and circumscribes their public role; see Simon Barraclough, 'The Dynamics of Coercion in the Malaysian Political Process', p. 808. The ISA has been regularly used in conjunction the Essential (Security Cases) Regulations (ESCAR) (1975), which enables the government to circumvent established judicial procedures for cases involving national security, and whose enactment prompted the Malaysian Bar Council to call on lawyers to boycott trials held under 'oppressive' regulations which flagrantly flouted the rule of law; see John A. Lent, 'Human Rights in Malaysia', p. 445, and Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> Simon Barraclough, 'Managing the Challenges of Islamic Revival in Malaysia: A Regime Perspective', p. 962.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.; Syed Ahmad Hussein, *Islam and Politics in Malaysia 1969-82: The Dynamics of Competing Traditions*, pp. 185-188.

<sup>29</sup> The term *dakwah songsang* literally means 'upside-down *dakwah*' and is used by the authorities to refer to false or deviant forms of Islamic activities. Cf. Mohamad Abu Bakar, 'Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia', p. 1052; Syed Ahmad Hussein, *Islam and Politics in Malaysia 1969-82: The Dynamics of Competing Traditions*, pp. 188-189.

### **3. ORGANISED ISLAMIC-RELATED VIOLENCE 1: THE DOCTRINE OF *KAFIR-MENKAFIR* AND THE MEMALI INCIDENT (NOVEMBER 1985)**

*Kafir-mengkafir* refers to the trading of accusations of one another's infidelity between different groups of Malay-Muslims, each holding adamantly to its own conception of Islam. In Malaysian politics, the conflicting parties involved were PAS and UMNO. The issue had its beginnings in PAS's animosity towards UMNO's cooperation with non-Muslim partners, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), in the governing coalition. By forming a multi-religious administration, UMNO was alleged to have been committing the forbidden act of appointing non-Muslim leaders to rule over Muslims. Such a stance had arisen since the mid-1960s, but was temporarily suspended during PAS's brief stint in the ruling National Front (BN – *Barisan Nasional*) coalition (1973-77).<sup>30</sup>

*Kafir-mengkafir* resurfaced in line with the exertion of influence of the Middle Eastern-influenced Young Turks in PAS – a development which would culminate in the deposition of Mohamad Asri Muda from PAS's leadership in 1982. The earliest post-coalition PAS's public branding of UMNO as *kafir* may be located to November 1979, when Mustapha Abu Bakar, Deputy Chairman of PAS's Commissioner Committee of Kelantan (1979-81), in a lecture in Ulu Besut, Terengganu, labeled UMNO members as apostates. As such, UMNO members were allegedly unfit to lead congregational prayers, unqualified to slaughter livestock for consumption and incapable of solemnising marriages. The religious acts, if continued to be led by UMNO members, were pronounced to become null and void. For example, a marriage formalised by an UMNO *imam* (head of congregation) was deemed to be illegal, such

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<sup>30</sup> Kamarulnizam Abdullah, 'National Security and Malay Unity: The Issue of Radical Religious Elements in Malaysia', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1999), p. 268.

that any offspring produced was considered to be illegitimate. Mustapha was eventually convicted in the *syariah* court for delivering a religious lecture without *tauliah* (formal letter of authority), and issuing a *fatwa* without *tauliah* and which went against religious law.<sup>31</sup>

Unperturbed by the court ruling, in September 1980, PAS's *Ulama* Council published a book, *Islam dan Politik: Hasil Kajian Ilmiah Ulama PAS* (Islam and Politics: Results of Scholarly Research by PAS's *Ulama*), which declared as apostates Muslims who condoned the separation of religion from politics and those who rejected God's laws in preference for man-made laws.<sup>32</sup> *Kafir-mengkafir* was crystallised as a national issue by the controversial speech delivered in April 1981 by Haji Abdul Hadi Awang, then PAS State Commissioner for Terengganu and PAS President since September 2003, in Banggol Peradong, Terengganu. This speech, infamously called *Amanat Haji Hadi*, outlined three major principles which governed PAS's fight against UMNO. First, PAS opposed UMNO and BN not because their names were as such, but because they had retained the colonial or infidel constitution that they inherited. Second, since the struggle, speeches and financial contribution of PAS members were all *jihad* (holy war), their deaths in the course of fighting UMNO members were as honourable martyrs. Third, one need not officially convert to other religions to become a *kafir*, instead, one could be thrown into infidelity by simply separating between religion and politics.<sup>33</sup>

The impact of *Amanat Haji Hadi* was to polarise Malay society into PAS and UMNO camps. The situation was particularly acute in the rural Malay heartlands of Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah. Families broke up, marriages were dissolved,

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<sup>31</sup> Kamarul zaman Haji Yusoff, *PAS Dalam Era Mohd Asri Muda 1965-1982* (M.A. thesis, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2004), pp. 381-382.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: 383.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*: 385.

religious feasts were boycotted, annual *zakat* (almsgiving) were paid not through official channels, and rival congregations simultaneously offered the same prayers in mosques.<sup>34</sup> Burgeoning audiences at PAS-organised lectures prompted the government to step up security measures against it. Following detentions under the ISA of three PAS Youth leaders, viz. Abu Bakar Chik, Bunyamin Yaakob and Muhammad Sabu, and amidst rumours that PAS members were preparing themselves for a military *jihād*, a ban was imposed in August 1984 on PAS gatherings in its four stronghold states.<sup>35</sup> A live television debate, scheduled for 11<sup>th</sup> November 1984, would have pitted three UMNO leaders against three PAS stalwarts on the *kafir-mengkafir* issue, but was eventually cancelled by the intervention of the *Yang diPertuan Agong* (king).<sup>36</sup> Following this, the government issued a White Paper entitled *The Threat to Muslim Unity and National Security*, which implicated PAS members in the subversive activities of extremist Islamic groups, and created the spectre of the communists manipulating PAS-inspired rifts to achieve their anti-democratic aims.<sup>37</sup>

In 1985, two bloody incidents astounded PAS members and the public alike into realising how far the government was prepared to resort to physical repression. Firstly, a PAS supporter was killed when UMNO-paid thugs attacked a PAS pre-by-election gathering in Lubok Merbau, Kedah.<sup>38</sup> PAS's legal advisor, Suhaimi Said, who wrote a pamphlet disclosing the event was consequently held under the ISA and

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<sup>34</sup> Kamarulnizam Abdullah, *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2003), pp. 193-194; cf. 'Fundamentalism on trial', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 May 1986; 'Amanat Haji Hadi bawa padah', *Mingguan Malaysia*, 13 June 1999; 'Prayers held in two mosques', *New Straits Times*, 8 December 2004.

<sup>35</sup> 'Countering a crusade', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 August 1984.

<sup>36</sup> 'Malaysia: Islam on the screen', *The Economist*, 27 October 1984; 'They shall not Pas', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 October 1984; 'The great non-debate', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 November 1984.

<sup>37</sup> Kamarulnizam Abdullah, *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia*, pp. 195-196; Geoffrey C. Gunn, 'Radical Islam in Southeast Asia: Rhetoric and Reality in the Middle Eastern Connection', p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Farish A. Noor, *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS (1951-2003) Volume 2*, p. 395.



expelled to district confinement.<sup>39</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1985, in the rural village of Memali near Baling, Kedah, police stormed upon a community of inadequately armed PAS villagers resisting the arrest of their leader, Ibrahim Mahmood – popularly known as Ibrahim Libya, who was accused of abusing Islam and inciting rebellion against the state. In the ensuing showdown, four policemen and fourteen villagers including Ibrahim lost their lives. Notwithstanding the heavy casualties on his side and their manifest ill-preparedness for armed combat, Ibrahim’s followers were alleged to have started hostilities by threatening and behaving aggressively towards the police.<sup>40</sup> The official version of events traced the police operations, including previously abortive ones, to provocative preparations made by Ibrahim Libya to topple the government by the use of force, via the setting up of a clandestine Islamic Revolutionary Movement which drew inspiration from similar movements in the Middle East.<sup>41</sup>

The polemic surrounding events of the ‘Memali tragedy’ has never really ended. The official explanation of the ‘Memali tragedy’ directly linked the violence with *Amanat Haji Hadi*’s advocacy of militant *jihād* against UMNO members.<sup>42</sup> Physical confrontation against the state was said to be passionately pursued by the PAS members, who earnestly believed they were fighting an infidel government. Although the resort towards violence may have been reflected Ibrahim Libya’s personal instruction under intense pressure rather than an execution of party policy, its relation to the *kafir-mengkafir* issue was arguably more than accidental. This message

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<sup>39</sup> Jomo Kwame Sundram and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, ‘The Politics of Malaysia’s Islamic Resurgence’, p. 862; Kamarulnizam Abdullah, *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia*, p. 194.

<sup>40</sup> Government of Malaysia, *Kertas Perintah 21 Tahun 1986: The Memali Incident* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1986), pp. 11, 21; Kamarulnizam Abdullah, *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia*, pp. 196-198.

<sup>41</sup> Government of Malaysia, *Kertas Perintah 21 Tahun 1986: The Memali Incident*, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: 5-6, appendix “B”; JAKIM, *Penjelasan Mengenai Isu Mengkafir Orang Islam, Jihad dan Mati Syahid* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2002), pp. 7, 24-30.

has been constantly hammered through the state-controlled media. The recorded confession of Muhamad Yusof Husin, a PAS activist detained following the Memali violence, has been the government's favourite evidence.<sup>43</sup> PAS, on the other hand, has been consistently commemorating, to the government's displeasure, the day of the Memali tragedy as 'Martyrdom Day'. It has openly declared disagreement with the official *fatwa* that Ibrahim Libya and his companions who perished in Memali were not martyrs, but rather were treacherous rebels (*bughah*).<sup>44</sup> PAS has claimed that Muhamad Yusof Husin's confession following the Memali tragedy was extracted under torture.<sup>45</sup>

Since the Memali tragedy, PAS has never really retracted from its position of defending the contents and implications of *Amanat Haji Hadi*. This intransigence has been related to the heavy influence among PAS leaders of Middle Eastern Islamist trends, which, under incessant state repression, have developed strong tendencies to excommunicate fellow Muslims who are willing to compromise with unIslamic rulership.<sup>46</sup> Despite embracing such extreme positions, PAS registered massive gains in the November 1999 general elections by capitalising on the *Reformasi* euphoria engulfing the Malays, still disgruntled at the government's humiliating treatment of Anwar Ibrahim, whom Dr. Mahathir sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy President of UMNO in September 1998,. For the first time, PAS led the opposition in

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<sup>43</sup> For Muhamad Yusof's statements to the authorities, see Government of Malaysia, *Kertas Perintah 21 Tahun 1986: The Memali Incident*, pp. 3, 5-6, 13-15, 17, 19), also quoted in Kamarulnizam Abdullah, *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia*, p. 197.

<sup>44</sup> PAS, *Isu Memali: Hakikat dan Realiti* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Penerangan PAS Pusat, 2002), pp. viii, 41-45.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*: 18.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Sheik Omar Ahmed Ali Abdurrahman, *The Present Rulers and Islam: Are they Muslims or not?* (London: Al-Firdous, 1990); Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 125-126. For an example of an attempt to establish an intellectual linkage between PAS and Middle Eastern extremist trends, see Astora Jabat, 'Pergolakan negara Arab jadi ilham: Pas tidak pernah sunyi daripada mengkafirkan UMNO', *Mingguan Malaysia*, 13 June 1999.

Parliament. At the state level, PAS retained Kelantan, captured Terengganu, and made significant inroads into Kedah, Perlis, Pahang, Perak and Selangor.

Faced with PAS's resurgent influence among upwardly mobile young Malays,<sup>47</sup> UMNO's legitimacy as the prime representative of the Malays was apparently put into question. Hence, since its 1999 electoral successes, PAS has been put on the defensive for failing to disavow *Amanat Haji Hadi*, which bore the blame for creating fissures within the Malay community. While PAS claimed that there was never any clear-cut promulgation of *Amanat Haji Hadi*'s deviation from Islamic teachings, the state insisted otherwise.<sup>48</sup> PAS was rebuked for failing to unambiguously withdraw *Amanat Haji Hadi* together with its *kafir-mengkafir* implications, which have been officially pronounced by the state as contradictory to Islamic faith and law.<sup>49</sup>

PAS tried instead to divorce *Amanat Haji Hadi* from its *kafir-mengkafir* implications. In response to doubts of PAS's sincerity in planning to open its door to non-Muslims for associate membership and electoral candidacy,<sup>50</sup> PAS's *Musryid al-'Am* (General Guide)-cum-Chief Minister of Kelantan, Nik Aziz Nik Mat, retorted that the PAS leadership had never adopted the practice of *kafir-mengkafir*, which was instead instigated by extremist camps within the party.<sup>51</sup> In defence, Haji Hadi Awang, by now PAS Deputy President and Chief Minister of Terengganu, pleaded that *Amanat Haji Hadi* not be cited in parts and the sensitive parts duly taken out of context. He claimed that read as a whole, *Amanat Haji Hadi* was a document

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<sup>47</sup> See the special report by Sangwon Suh and Santha Oorjitham, 'Battle for Islam: UMNO and Pas are locked in a struggle for the Malay soul. The outcome may irrevocably change Malaysian society', *Asiaweek*, 16 June 2000.

<sup>48</sup> 'Saya tidak perlu bertaubat - Hadi', *Utusan Malaysia*, 3 August 2000; 'Majlis Fatwa putuskan 'Amanat Haji Hadi' bercanggah - Hamid', *Utusan Malaysia*, 5 August 2000; 'Amanat Hadi diwartakan menyalahi ajaran Islam', *Mingguan Malaysia*, 22 April 2001.

<sup>49</sup> Dato' Wan Zahidi Wan Teh, *Pelaksanaan Siasah Syar'iyah dalam Pentadbiran Kerajaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2003), pp. 36-54.

<sup>50</sup> 'PAS mahu letak calon bukan Islam', *Berita Harian*, 31 May 1999.

<sup>51</sup> 'Bukan gimik politik - Nik Aziz', *Utusan Malaysia*, 3 June 1999.

outlining the boundaries separating between faith and infidelity, without pin-pointing any group or individual deemed to have gone out of the fold of Islam.<sup>52</sup> Haji Hadi claimed that his speech was manipulated by PAS's machinery who, despite once ardently presenting *Amanat Haji Hadi* as lucid evidence of UMNO's infidelity, had now themselves joined UMNO.<sup>53</sup> For similar reasons, other PAS leaders such as Nik Aziz, party President Fadzil Noor and deputy President Mustafa Ali regarded the *Amanat Haji Hadi* issue played up by UMNO as anachronistic and outdated.<sup>54</sup> PAS was adamant that *Amanat Haji Hadi* was Islamically justifiable and was not guilty for bringing about Malay disunity. Public calls upon PAS leaders to repudiate *Amanat Haji Hadi* fell on deaf ears.<sup>55</sup> As in 1985, a planned *muzakarah* (discussion) to resolve the UMNO-PAS dispute pertaining to *Amanat Haji Hadi* and revolving issues of Malay unity, never materialised despite initially promising efforts by moderating organisations.<sup>56</sup>

PAS's shattering electoral reversals in the 2004 elections, losing Terengganu and having its representation in the federal Parliament and state legislatures heavily reduced, were due to a combination of internal weaknesses of the opposition front and the ruling coalition's astute capitalisation of post-Mahathir political variables.<sup>57</sup> Not confronted with extraordinary circumstances and buoyed by the feel-good sentiment

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<sup>52</sup> See the interview with Haji Hadi Awang, "'Bukan saya kafirkan UMNO" - Hadi Awang jelaskan isu perpecahan akibat amanatnya', *Mingguan Malaysia*, 13 August 2000.

<sup>53</sup> 'Isu kafirkan UMNO sudah selesai – Hadi', *Utusan Malaysia*, 22 February 2001.

<sup>54</sup> 'Pas anggap soal Amanat Hadi isu basi', *Utusan Malaysia*, 27 March 2001; 'Amanat Hadi sudah lapuk - Nik Aziz', *Utusan Malaysia*, 24 April 2001; 'Isu "amanat" tak timbul – Fadzil', *Utusan Malaysia*, 25 April 2001.

<sup>55</sup> cf. 'Pas perlu tolak Amanat Hadi -- Buat secara rasmi sebagai tanda ikhlas tidak pernah kafirkan ahli UMNO – Najib', *Utusan Malaysia*, 26 March 2001; 'Pas pertahan Amanat Hadi -- Fadzil: Buktikan kandungan ucapannya bercanggah ajaran Islam', *Utusan Malaysia*, 27 March 2001; 'Hadi tidak mahu tarik balik', *Utusan Malaysia*, 28 March 2001; 'Hadi akan terus ceramah amanatnya', *Utusan Malaysia*, 16 April 2001.

<sup>56</sup> 'Muzakarah `Amanat Haji Hadi' dibatal', *Utusan Malaysia*, 3 May 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'The UMNO-PAS Struggle: Analysis of PAS's Defeat in 2004', in Saw Swee-Hock and K. Kesavapany (eds.), *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), pp. 100–131.

surrounding a new Prime Minister and his successful projection of *Islam Hadhari*,<sup>58</sup> the majority of Malays returned to voting UMNO.<sup>59</sup> PAS's inability to shift its doctrinal position with regard to the *kafir-mengkafir* issue and *Amanat Haji Hadi* has lent credence to the state's allegations that PAS bore sympathies, or at least tacitly colluded with probable or actual attempts at violent insurrection to install an Islamic administration in Malaysia.

For example, it never escaped the attention of the mainstream media that activists arrested for involvement in the *Mujahidin* Group of Malaysia (KMM) and the *Jemaah Islamiah* (JI), were former or active PAS members. This included a son of Nik Aziz Nik Mat, PAS's Chief Minister of Kelantan, Nik Adli Nik Aziz, who was detained under the ISA together with nine others in the first wave of KMM arrests in early August 2001.<sup>60</sup> KMM was alleged to have launched attacks on a police station, on non-Muslim religious sites and assassinated Dr. Joe Fernandez, a Kedah BN state legislative assembly member notorious for his evangelising activities among Malay-Muslim youths.<sup>61</sup> In another case of actual violence, Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir pointed out that most of the Al-Ma'unah rebels who had participated in the

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<sup>58</sup> Officially translated as 'civilisational Islam', *Islam Hadhari* may be understood as a progressive form of Islam which espouses a joining of forces between the *ulama* and professional technocrats, a rational acquisition of knowledge, a balance between spiritual and material development, and religious tolerance. As opposed to *Islam Siasi* (Political Islam), which emphasises the acquisition of political power a pre-requisite to a comprehensive practice of Islam, *Islam Hadhari* merely calls for values and principles of a state to be compatible with Islam, without necessarily forging a state which incorporates the Islamic legal framework. In his inaugural presidential address at the 55<sup>th</sup> UMNO General Assembly on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2004, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi outlined ten fundamental principles of *Islam Hadhari*, viz. faith and piety in God, a just and trustworthy government, free and independent people, a vigorous mastery of knowledge, a balanced and comprehensive economic development, a good quality of life, protection of the rights of minority groups and women, cultural and moral integrity, conservation of the environment and strong defence capabilities. For the state's official conception of *Islam Hadhari*, see Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 'Menuju kecemerlangan', keynote address at the 55<sup>th</sup> UMNO General Assembly, *Utusan Malaysia*, 24 September 2004; <http://www.islam.gov.my/islamhadhari/> (accessed 21 February 2007).

<sup>59</sup> 'Perubahan sikap Melayu bantu kemenangan BN', *Utusan Malaysia*, 23 March 2004.

<sup>60</sup> 'Anak Nik Aziz ketua Mujahidin Malaysia', *Utusan Malaysia*, 9 August 2001; N. Ganesan, 'Malaysia in 2002: Political Consolidation and Change?', *Asian Survey*, vol. XLIII, no. 1 (2003), pp. 151.

<sup>61</sup> 'Anak Nik Aziz ditangkap: Disyaki antara tokoh terpenting Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia', *Mingguan Malaysia*, 5 August 2001; 'Ramai lagi akan ditangkap: Abdullah – Polis mendapati kegiatan Mujahidin di negara ini sudah serius', *Utusan Malaysia*, 6 August 2001.

commando-style arms heist and illegal military training in Grik, Perak, in July 2000, had at one time been PAS members.<sup>62</sup> UMNO Secretary-General, Khalil Yaakob, further linked the Al-Ma'unah rebellion to a PAS-style militancy which had derived inspiration directly from *Amanat Haji Hadi*.<sup>63</sup>

Following 9-11 and the American incursion into Afghanistan, emotional outbursts of sympathy for the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network shown by PAS's leadership easily fell prey to the mainstream media. Added to this were PAS-orchestrated anti-USA demonstrations, briefly recreating the tumultuous scenes surrounding the *Reformasi* agitations of 1998-99.<sup>64</sup> Throughout January to February 2002, the country's premier television channel, *Radio Televisyen Malaysia* (RTM), repeatedly played video clips of the Memali tragedy in an attempt to establish PAS as guilty of extremism and fanaticism (*taksub*), which were conducive to militancy.<sup>65</sup> Criticisms that the government was engaging in blatant propaganda did not stop it in following years from occasionally airing clips of past extremist-related violence.<sup>66</sup> In 2003, the media made a big issue out of Haji Abdul Hadi Awang's presence at an Islamic congress in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia in October 2000, since participants at the congress had included prominent Indonesian militants such as JI leader Abu Bakar Basyir and *Laskar Jundullah* leader Agus Dwikarna.<sup>67</sup> PAS retorted that Abdul Hadi had attended the congress upon invitations from Hasanuddin University and Indonesian NGOs in his capacity as leader of the Terengganu state government, and had merely spoken of the implementation of

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<sup>62</sup> 'Ramai anggota kumpulan Al-Ma'unah ahli Pas: PM', *Berita Harian*, 21 July 2000. The Al-Ma'unah affair is dealt with in the following section of this paper.

<sup>63</sup> 'Amanat Hadi dorong penyokong bertindak militan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 7 August 2000.

<sup>64</sup> K.S. Nathan, 'Malaysia: 11 September and the Politics of Incumbency', *Southeast Asian Affairs 2002* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp. 164-165.

<sup>65</sup> 'Memali: PAS pertikai arahan Majlis Fatwa Kebangsaan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 13 March 2002.

<sup>66</sup> 'Siar 'Amanat Haji Hadi' elak umat Islam bermusuhan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 27 March 2003; 'Minister rejects criticism of anti-militant drive', *Straits Times* (Singapore), 9 June 2004.

<sup>67</sup> 'Kehadiran Hadi di Makassar bukti Pas cenderung keganasan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 10 February 2003; 'Hadi boleh dikenakan tindakan undang-undang', *Utusan Malaysia*, 11 February 2003.

Islamic administration and laws in Terengganu and Kelantan.<sup>68</sup> Such publicity was meant more to derive political benefit for UMNO than to remind the masses of the dangers of fanaticism, but insofar as it prompted PAS into stoutly defending its doctrinal positions with regard to its participation in extremist-like activities and confrontations with the authorities, UMNO had achieved its aim of linking PAS with violence and terrorism.

On the whole, the impact of 9-11 and in particular the UMNO and the government's manipulation of the event, by inciting renewed fear of Islamic extremism, was to reinforce the frightening impression that non-Muslims and liberal Muslims had of PAS.<sup>69</sup> For the vast majority of Malay-Muslims, this impression has been seemingly confirmed by PAS's sweeping rejection of the concept of *Islam Hadhari*, which has proven to be an immensely popular catchphrase, even if its implementation is still in early stages. Such uncompromising repudiation of *Islam Hadhari* is best exemplified by Haji Abdul Hadi Awang himself, who, in his book *Hadharah Islamiyyah bukan Islam Hadhari* (Islamic Civilisation, not Civilisational Islam), rebukes *Islam Hadhari* as a hybrid religion which allows the practice of a compartmentalised Islam alongside unIslamic elements, and therefore a *bid'ah* (religious innovation) with deviationist potential.<sup>70</sup> *Hadharah Islamiyyah bukan Islam Hadhari* has been put under scrutiny by JAKIM for fear of its leading to public confusion over the *Islam Hadhari* concept,<sup>71</sup> but has as yet escaped a ban despite calls to that effect from UMNO politicians. Kelantan Chief Minister Nik Aziz Nik Mat, on

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<sup>68</sup> PAS, *Ulasan Terkini... Tuan Guru Ab. Hadi Restui Pengganas?*, Tanjong Karang: Dewan Pemuda PAS, 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Claudia Derichs, 'A Step Forward: Malaysian Ideas for Political Change', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 37, issue 1 (2002), pp. 50-51; Lee Hock Guan, 'Malay Dominance and Opposition Politics in Malaysia', *Southeast Asian Affairs 2002* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp. 191-192.

<sup>70</sup> Abdul Hadi Awang, *Hadharah Islamiyyah bukan Islam Hadhari* (Kuala Lumpur: Nufair Street, 2005), pp. 24-34, 50, 90, 130, 196.

<sup>71</sup> 'JPM edar buku Islam Hadhari melalui JAKIM', *Berita Minggu*, 13 March 2005.

the other hand, defends *Hadharah Islamiyyah bukan Islam Hadhari* as a more authentic explication of Islam than the state's official explanation of *Islam Hadhari*.<sup>72</sup>

In fact, he shuns UMNO's *Islam Hadhari* project as a measure of UMNO's desire to imitate PAS's implementation of Islam in Kelantan.<sup>73</sup>

#### **4. ORGANISED ISLAMIC-RELATED VIOLENCE 2: THE AL-MA'UNAH AFFAIR (JULY 2000)**

The Al-Ma'unah affair started dramatically with an arms heist by members of a hitherto obscure Al-Ma'unah movement on an army post and camp in the rustic district of Grik, Perak, during the wee hours of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2000. The whole nation was initially stunned by the efficiency and magnitude of the operation, which exposed serious loopholes in security procedures at army bases. Dangerous weapons in huge quantities were transported via three four-wheel drive vehicles to the jungles of Bukit Jenalik near the small town of Sauk. There, the rebels allegedly engaged in military training as preparations for an uprising to install an Islamic government by force of arms. During negotiations with the security forces, among the demands of Al-Ma'unah leader Mohd. Amin Mohd. Razali were the resignation of the Prime Minister, his replacement with an Islamic scholar, the overthrow of the presently tyrannical government and the implementation of Islamic law.<sup>74</sup>

By the time of Al-Ma'unah's eventual surrender on the evening of 6<sup>th</sup> July, one rebel and two members of the security forces who had been held hostage within

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<sup>72</sup> 'Pandangan berbeza tentang *Hadharah Islamiah*', *Utusan Malaysia*, 16 April 2005.

<sup>73</sup> See the interview with Nik Aziz Nik Mat, 'Rahsia PAS bertahan di Kelantan', *Mingguan Malaysia*, 20 March 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Zabidi Mohamed, *Maunah: Kebenaran Yang Sebenarnya – The Naked Truth* (Kuala Lumpur: Zabidi Publication, 2003), pp. 257-258, 286-287.



the rebels' jungle sanctuary, had lost their lives.<sup>75</sup> Significantly, the two murder victims, known as Trooper Mathew and Corporal Sagadevan, were non-Muslims. Outside the jungles, Al-Ma'unah members also launched attacks, albeit in vain, to damage what they perceived as abominable non-Muslim symbols such as the Hindu temple in Batu Caves, and multinational breweries around industrial estates in Selangor.<sup>76</sup> The attacks were supposedly meant to create chaos and ignite a rebellious climate around areas near Kuala Lumpur.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, Al-Ma'unah members around the country were rounded up and interrogated; some were eventually detained under the ISA, as had their comrades who had based themselves in Bukit Jenalik. These nineteen insurgents were later tried in the high court and found guilty under section 121 of the Penal Code of waging war against the *Yang diPertuan Agong* – the first ever usage of this law. The three main Al-Ma'unah leaders, viz. Mohd. Amin Mohd. Razali, Zahit Muslim and Jamaludin Darus, received the death penalty, while their sixteen accomplices were sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>78</sup> Later, Jemari Jusoh, one of the sixteen initially handed over the life sentence, was meted out the death penalty for actively taking part in the killing of Trooper Mathew.<sup>79</sup>

A detailed analysis of the Al-Ma'unah affair has been elusive due to the relative obscurity of Al-Ma'unah and contradictory facts contained in journalistic reporting of the astonishing events of July 2000.<sup>80</sup> However, the lack of accuracy of information on Al-Ma'unah has been alleviated by the publication in 2003 of

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<sup>75</sup> 'Perompak senjata serah diri - Peristiwa berakhir dengan mengorbankan hanya tiga nyawa', *Utusan Malaysia*, 7 July 2000.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*: 236, 239, 245, 250.

<sup>77</sup> 'Polis tumpas rancangan huru-harakan ibu negara', *Utusan Malaysia*, 21 July 2000; 'Carlsberg sahkan cubaan letup kilang', *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> '3 termasuk Amin dihukum mati - 16 lagi anggota Al-Ma'unah dipenjara sepanjang hayat', *Utusan Malaysia*, 29 december 2001.

<sup>79</sup> 'Jemari dihukum mati - Hukuman yang sama ke atas tiga lagi anggota Al-Ma'unah dikekalkan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 27 June 2003.

<sup>80</sup> For a sample of these contradictory reports, sometimes by the same newspaper on the same day, see D.L. Daun, 'Paranormal Shootings in Sauk', *Aliran Monthly* 20 (5), 2000, pp. 21-23.

*Maunah: Kebenaran Yang Sebenar – The Naked Truth*, by Zabidi Mohamed, the defence counsel for two leading Al-Ma'unah insurgents, Zahit Muslim and Jamaludin Darus. In this book, to which the following exposition of Al-Ma'unah is factually indebted, many of the Al-Ma'unah rebels were depicted as unknowing victims of their leader, Mohd. Amin Mohd. Razali (hereafter 'Amin'). They had no intention of rebelling against the state, and had innocently been at Bukit Jenalik as a participant of Al-Ma'unah's regular courses on spirituality. The arms heist and consequent shooting practice in the jungles were thought to be a joint training session fully condoned by the military. By the time they realised that Amin was really fighting a physical war, they had grown so fearful of the severe punishment as threatened by Amin, should they be caught trying to escape. Furthermore, they were unsure as to who among them were or were not Amin loyalists. They also suffered from the delusion that Amin possessed the mystical capacity of foretelling any bad intentions harboured against him, that might be lurking in the minds and hearts of his followers.

The founding of Al-Ma'unah is attributed to Amin's fascination with the Malay martial arts, *silat*, which he combined with occultism and theosophical interpretations of Islam. He claimed to have inherited his *silat* abilities from the Indonesian *guru* of Al-Ma'unah - an organisation known to have conducted joint-training with Indonesia's military - the *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI).<sup>81</sup> Amin imported the name 'Al-Ma'unah' from Indonesia but refashioned its Malaysian namesake into a movement he totally dominated. As news spread of Amin's supernatural abilities and willingness to bequeath knowledge of his 'inner

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<sup>81</sup> Following the eruption of the Al-Ma'unah affair, this Indonesian *guru*, Ibnu Abbas, disowned Amin. Ibnu Abbas explained that the name 'Al-Ma'unah' was derived from a Quranic phrase meaning 'the help from God'. Al-Ma'unah was an art of self-defence which harnessed inner powers in strengthening the mind, the Islamic faith, and acknowledging the greatness of God. In Indonesia, Al-Ma'unah was used by the state to help defend the country, rather than challenging the state. See Ibnu Abbas' media interview, as reproduced in Zabidi Mohamed, *Maunah: Kebenaran Yang Sebenar – The Naked Truth*, chapter 11.

energy' via devoted spiritual exercises, his followers increased in number. In April 1999, Al-Ma'unah was legally registered with Amin as President and Zahit Muslim as Deputy President. Its activities were advertised in Malay magazines, in Harakah – PAS's official mouthpiece, and via a website. Al-Ma'unah became briefly well-known for its successful practice of traditional healing and free services offered at its clinics. By July 2000, Al-Ma'unah's membership had grown to 1700, comprising of aficionados of *silat* and traditional medicinal techniques from all over the country and Brunei.<sup>82</sup>

Notwithstanding Amin's charisma at a young age,<sup>83</sup> it still perplexes readers of Zabidi's account of Al-Ma'unah that Amin's rebellious instincts could have escaped the attention of his followers until their impending apprehension by the authorities. At certain times during the various Al-Ma'unah spiritual courses, he did not conceal his abhorrence of the present Malaysian government for its neglect of Islamic law. Whilst portraying himself as intensively spiritual, his references when lecturing on the obligation of *jihad* were to the situations in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Ambon. Spiritual *jihad* i.e. *jihad* against the *nafs* (desires), as enjoined by honourable masters of Sufism – the legitimate discipline of Islamic spirituality which focuses on purifying the heart, did not seem to be on Amin's agenda. Instead, he was overheard as having expressed intention to send his followers abroad to fight enemies who were victimising Muslims. His background as a former military spy did not invite suspicion from his followers. Neither did Amin's proud admission that as an adolescent student at Ibrahim Libya's *madrasah* (religious school), he witnessed the horrific scenes during the police raid at Memali in 1985.

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<sup>82</sup> In the wake of the Al-Ma'unah affair, twenty-seven members of Al-Ma'unah's branch in Brunei were arrested under the country's ISA in order to assist in Malaysian police investigations; see 'Brunei tahan 27 ahli Ma'unah - Bagi membantu siasatan berhubung kes rompakan senjata api di Gerik', *Utusan Malaysia*, 14 July 2000.

<sup>83</sup> Amin was thirty years old during the Al-Ma'unah affair.

Only after the killings at Bukit Jenalik, executed at the behest of Amin himself, did his followers realise that Amin was intent upon avenging the ‘cruelty’ perpetrated by the authorities on the Memali insurgents of 1985.<sup>84</sup>

In the opinion of the present author, Zabidi’s account of the Al-Ma’unah affair is influenced by his desire to divest his clients from the ultimate responsibility of having carried out the gruesome killings at Bukit Jenalik. To him, the Al-Ma’unah rebels at Bukit Jenalik were a motley group, not all of whom sanctioned the violence that occurred. This goes against the version of events as presented by the police and the prosecutors: that all the Al-Ma’unah rebels had purposely and knowingly participated in a military *jihād* designed to overthrow the government by militant force.<sup>85</sup> Towards the end of his book, however, Zabidi revealed his aghast at having discovered, through frank conversations with two convicted Al-Ma’unah members in prison, that they had indeed advocated Amin’s rebellious plot in early July 2000, without exhibiting any remorse of the violence that had transpired at Bukit Jenalik.<sup>86</sup>

## 5. BRIEF COMPARISONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, we have focused on cases of actual violence in Malaysia. By Southeast Asian standards, they are comparatively meagre and shallow. The threat of

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<sup>84</sup> In the wake of the discovery of KMM cells in August 2001, Deputy Interior Minister, Zainal Abidin Zin, stressed that there existed continuity between the Memali incident in 1985 and the establishment of KMM, and in turn, between KMM and Al-Ma’unah. Al-Ma’unah’s origins can thus be traced to state brutality in Memali, which elicited negative reaction among the younger generation and would be manifested in later years, should the opportunity arise. This shows that state violence may breed a similarly violent response from the people, although not necessarily immediately. See ‘Anak Nik Aziz ketua Mujahidin Malaysia’, *Utusan Malaysia*, 09 August 2001.

<sup>85</sup> ‘KPN sahkan sebahagian perompak anggota Al-Ma’unah’, *Utusan Malaysia*, 07 July 2000; ‘Pendakwa: Zahit buktikan ahli tahu misi Ma’unah’, *Utusan Malaysia*, 24 October 2001; ‘19 tertuduh tahu niat guling kerajaan’, *Utusan Malaysia*, 25 October 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Zabidi Mohamed, *Maunah: Kebenaran Yang Sebenar – The Naked Truth*, pp. 307-324.

uprising posed by Malaysia's Islamic radicals comes nowhere near the dangers to constitutional rule brought by, for example, the Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, *Laskar Jundullah* and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI – *Front Pembela Islam*) in Indonesia, and the multiple Malay-Muslim irredentist groups instigating pandemonium in the southern Thai provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala and occasionally, Songkhla.<sup>87</sup> Yet, transnational linkages operated by terrorist networks in the age of globalisation expose Malaysia to a real possibility of terrorist-related upheavals within its borders. The possibility is raised by revelations that Malaysian nationals have been involved in JI bombing campaigns in Indonesia.<sup>88</sup>

While it is imperative that the Malaysian state takes pre-emptive measures to stem probable or threatened violence, it needs to maintain credibility in the eyes of the Malay-Muslim population by not lumping together all Islamic groups as bearing terrorist potential. It need not go overboard and discredit itself by sweepingly branding Islamic movements as 'extremist'. This happened, for example, when the state clamped down upon the Darul Arqam movement in 1994 after accusing it of operating suicide army training camps in Thailand; an allegation that was never proven in court. Using the state-controlled media, the ruling elites hammered through the idea that Darul Arqam's sufistic and messianic teachings, would somehow motivate its followers towards violence in the manner of previous outbursts of extremist paramilitary activities. Such propaganda went against the peaceful history of Darul Arqam, notwithstanding some controversial aspects with regard to its religious teachings and

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<sup>87</sup> For a comparative perspective, see for example the cover story by Ahmed Rashid, 'March of the Militants', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 March 1995; the special report on Islam in Asia 'Standing Up for Islam', *Time*, 10 March 2003; and preliminary observations in Carlyle A. Thayer, *Radical Islam and Political Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, paper presented at the ISEAS-SSAAPS winter seminar on 'Globalisation and its Counter Forces', Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 23 - 27 February 2004.

<sup>88</sup> 'More than 100 marriages involve key JI members', *The Star*, 7 September 2004; 'One big terrorist family', *Straits Times* (Singapore), 8 September 2004.

practices. But in Malaysia, constitutional freedom of religion applies only with respect to Islam *vis-à-vis* other religions, and not among different interpretations of Islam. The Malaysian government, as represented by its religious bureaucracy, considers its version of religious orthodoxy as infallibly applicable upon the Malay-Muslim population, although legitimate evidence indicates that contravening positions, as adopted for instance by Darul Arqam, had been tolerated within the framework of acceptable differences of opinion in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Refusal to acknowledge religious pluralism in Malaysia developed out of a peculiar Islamic administrative structure which overrules diversity between Islamic traditions and organisations, and from an obsessive desire of Malay ruling elites to ward off any signs of Malay-Muslim disunity in the wake of maintaining the delicate political balance between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Lacking evidence of Darul Arqam's alleged propensity towards violence, the state postulated a necessary correlation between deviant forms of Islam, fanaticism and violence – these together constituted 'extremism'. Darul Arqam eventually disbanded following large-scale arrests of leaders under the ISA and massive raids on its settlements.<sup>89</sup> Even after its demise, there have been occasional scares of a Darul Arqam revival, not least during the eruption of the Al-Ma'unah affair.<sup>90</sup> The state's concern may have been prompted by disclosures under investigation that some Al-

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<sup>89</sup> The present author has dealt extensively with different aspects of the Darul Arqam controversy; see Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'New Trends of Islamic Resurgence in Contemporary Malaysia: Sufi-Revivalism, Messianism and Economic Activism', *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1999), pp. 1-74; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'Political Dimensions of Religious Conflict in Malaysia: State Response to an Islamic Movement', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 28, no. 80 (2000), pp. 32-65; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'Pemerintah dan Gerakan Islam di Malaysia', *Pemikir*, no. 23 (2001), pp. 111-158; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'Inter-Movement Tension among Resurgent Muslims in Malaysia: Response to the State Clampdown on Darul Arqam in 1994', *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2003), pp. 361-387; and Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'The Banning of Darul Arqam in Malaysia', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2005), pp. 87-128, for a sample of writings on the issue.

<sup>90</sup> See the following special reports in *Utusan Malaysia*, 13 July 2000: 'Jakarta markas Arqam' – headline news, 'Taksud terhadap Asaari didakwa meningkat', 'Jakim perlu berterus terang', 'Tanggapan bekas ahli mahu hidupkan Al-Arqam dikesali'.

Ma'unah leaders had had the experience of studying under and joining Darul Arqam.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, while the main strand of Darul Arqam never approved or engaged in violence, some of its former members reportedly have. As further examples, former Darul Arqam members were implicated in the temple desecration incident in Kerling, Selangor, in 1978.<sup>92</sup> More recently, Imam Samudra, the JI activist eventually found guilty for the bombings in Bali, Indonesia in October 2002, was said to have confessed to investigators that he was active in Darul Arqam during his residency in Malaysia.<sup>93</sup>

One undeniable fact is that by linking Islamic movements and parties with terrorism and violence, thus sweepingly categorising them as extremists, the ruling elites gain political mileage as fear is installed into the minds of the moderately inclined Malay-Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The state has done this successfully to ward off the challenge from its competitors for the mantle of legitimate defender of Islam. Its serious rivals were independent Islamic movements such as Darul Arqam and Islamic political parties, particularly PAS. In the midst of the Al-Ma'unah affair, for example, Al-Ma'unah members were openly identified as PAS supporters, by virtue of the discovery of PAS's paraphernalia during raids on Al-Ma'unah's centres.<sup>94</sup> Despite PAS spokesmen's denials of links between PAS and Al-Ma'unah, PAS could not deny the fact that its black and white Islamic state ideology had influenced the Al-Ma'unah rebels. PAS further discredited itself by persistently

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<sup>91</sup> In particular, Mohd. Amin Mohd. Razali himself and his deputy, Zahit Muslim. See Zabidi Mohamed, *Maunah: Kebenaran Yang Sebenar – The Naked Truth*, pp. 63, 76, 175, 283; 'Zahit dakwa halang Amin serang balai polis', *Utusan Malaysia*, 4 April 2001.

<sup>92</sup> Ameer Ali, 'Islamic Revivalism in Harmony and Conflict: The Experience in Sri Lanka and Malaysia', *Asian Survey*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1984), p. 306.

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.swara.net/en/news/lihat-dalam.php?ID=446&cat=News>, accessed 29 July 2003

<sup>94</sup> See the respective statements by the Prime Minister and Defence Minister in 'Hampir semua sokong Pas - Perdana Menteri dedahkan identiti kumpulan Al-Ma'unah', *Utusan Malaysia*, 21 July 2000; and 'We Are Concerned' about the educated members, says Najib', *Asiaweek*, 21 July 2000.

claiming that the Al-Ma'unah affair had been stage-managed by the government in an effort to tarnish the reputation of Islamic groups.<sup>95</sup>

The present author is inclined to disagree with any necessary connection postulated between particular interpretations or understandings of Islamic doctrine, and violence. The Malaysian state's positing a causal relationship linking deviationism, fanaticism and violence, is heavily conditioned by the nature of its political competition with independent Islamic groups for influence among the Malay-Muslim masses. Both perpetrators of actual violence outlined in this paper, viz. the Memali insurgents and the Al-Ma'unah rebels, embraced different Islamic doctrinal orientations respectively. The former were influenced by Middle Eastern radical revivalist doctrines as allegedly disseminated by PAS leaders, whereas the latter embraced theosophical interpretations which had strong roots in the syncretic nature of Islam in the Malay-Indonesian world. The lawyer Zabidi Mohamed's attempt to equate the deviationism of Al-Ma'unah with that of Darul Arqam is highly questionable. Al-Ma'unah's occultism was in no way similar to Darul Arqam's Sufism, which, unlike Al-Ma'unah's teachings, did not neglect the learning and practice of the essentials of Islam.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Darul Arqam's version of Sufism integrated traditional spiritualism, which encouraged a culture of tolerance and accommodation, with the intellectual pragmatism of progressive Islamic reformists.<sup>97</sup>

In this paper, we have not included elaborate discussions of cases of probable and threatened violence, such as revelations about KMM and JI cells operating in

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<sup>95</sup> See the respective statements by then PAS Secretary-General Nasharuddin Mat Isa, Deputy President Abdul Hadi Awang and Vice-President Mustafa Ali: 'Pas enggan minta maaf - Masih anggap peristiwa rompakan senjata di Sauk sandiwara', *Utusan Malaysia*, 6 January 2002; 'Setiasaha Pas akan didakwa - Jabatan Peguam Negara sedang teliti tuduhan menghasut dan hina mahkamah', *Utusan Malaysia*, 9 January 2002; and 'Pas dakwa hanya rompak senjata sandiwara', *Utusan Malaysia*, 11 January 2002.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Zabidi Mohamed, *Maunah: Kebenaran Yang Sebenar – The Naked Truth*, pp. 78-79, 310-312, 324.

<sup>97</sup> Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'Sufi Undercurrents in Islamic Revivalism: Traditional, Post-Traditional and Modern Images of Islamic Activism in Malaysia – Part 2', *Islamic Quarterly*, vol. XLV, no. 3 (2001), pp. 178-185.



Malaysia. The suspects' treacherous plots and inclinations to invoke violence have not been proven in a court of law. Their ideological underpinnings and militant interpretations of *jihad* are inadequate evidence to prove their allegedly violent tendencies. Yet, this has been the state's justification in detaining them under the ISA.<sup>98</sup> We have to be wary of accepting at will information coming from the state's sources. As reminded by John Sidel,<sup>99</sup> a lot of information pertaining to the terrorist movement in Indonesia were extracted under torture, hence downgrading their reliability. Such a scenario is likely to exist with respect to ISA detentions in Malaysia as well. Malaysia's religious bureaucracy's endeavour in disseminating anti-militant explanations of *jihad* and of peace and security in Islam are commendable,<sup>100</sup> but they may be rendered futile by the state's own exaggerated violence on citizens implicated with violence, or the state's unwarranted strikes on unproven conspiracies. The causes of violence are as much political as they are grounded in some religious doctrine prejudicially interpreted. It is apt here to quote from several theses on religion and violence put forward by Bruce Lincoln:

Those who are interested in undertaking violence can always find arguments and precedents that sanctify their purpose, but selective reading and tendentious interpretation are an important part of this process.... Religious considerations are never the sole determining factor and there is no necessary relation between religion and violence. In most instances, religious considerations probably help to inhibit violence.... Just as the use of violence tends to elicit a violent riposte, so the religious valorization of violence prompts its victims to frame their violent responses in religious terms.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> 'Kesan cegah aktiviti militan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 17 September 2004.

<sup>99</sup> John Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Shifting Patterns of Religious Violence in Indonesia*, seminar paper presented at the Centre of International Studies (CIS), School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia, 17 February 2005. John Sidel is Sir Patrick Gillam Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics (LSE).

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.islam.gov.my/e-rujukan/jihad2.html>, <http://www.islam.gov.my/e-rujukan/lihat.php?jakim=79>, both accessed 21 February 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Bruce Lincoln, 'Theses on Religion & Violence', *ISIM Review*, no. 15 (2005), p. 12. Bruce Lincoln is Caroline E. Haskell Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Chicago.

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