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Non-violent extremists? Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia

KEN WARD*¹

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) is a radical Muslim organisation whose origins go back two and a half decades. It espouses an ideology crafted during the 1950s by the Palestinian, Taqiuddin an-Nabhani. Hizbut Tahrir's international leadership exerts control over its Indonesian branch's activities to an extent virtually unprecedented in Indonesian political life. Like other radical Muslim movements, HTI is bitterly anti-Western and rejects capitalism, democracy, liberalism and pluralism. Its objective is to turn Indonesia into an Islamic state that would be merged into a global caliphate or Muslim superstate. Unusually for a radical group, HTI strictly eschews violence, though its rhetoric is often strident and inflammatory. HTI also opposes terrorism, but contrives to depict terrorist attacks that have taken place in Indonesia as the result of Western manipulation and conspiracies. Although HTI retains some elements of the clandestine life it led when it was first set up, it has provoked surprisingly little hostility from the Indonesian political mainstream or security authorities. It is likely to continue to grow and remain the source of a powerful critique of Indonesia's status quo. But this is no guarantee, however, that it will succeed even in the long term in positioning Indonesia for merger into an international caliphate.

Two long-term observers of Indonesia wrote in 2008 that: 'Regimes, rulers and miscellaneous radicals have come and gone, but an underlying equilibrium continually reasserts itself as an openness to external ideas, people and products ... pluralism remains the bedrock fact of Indonesian society' (MacIntyre and Ramage 2008: 3). Yet not all external ideas or people inspired by them foster pluralism. HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, or the Indonesian Party of Liberation), for example, is a foreign transplant in Indonesian soil that rejects pluralism, as well as democracy, liberalism and nationalism. HTI is one of several radical Muslim organisations in Indonesia that have shown considerable staying power over the last decade or so, while others have indeed 'come and gone'. In this article, I will try to evaluate HTI's current standing by looking at its origins, its ideology and its strategies for achieving power. To clear up a common misconception, I will also examine its policy towards terrorism.

Islam's Middle Eastern heartland has acquired greater influence over Indonesia's Muslim community in recent years. While never entirely shut off from the Middle East even during the colonial era, Indonesian Muslims became

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more receptive to ideas and doctrines emanating from Arabia, Egypt and elsewhere just as President Soeharto was blocking off avenues for the pursuit of Muslim political aims at home. What reached Indonesia was often one variant or other of the thesis that 'Islam is the solution' for a Muslim country's political, economic, social and moral problems. First, Muslim Brotherhood writings in translation, including the works of its firebrand theorist, Sayyid Qutb, offered Indonesians an early bridge to radical Middle Eastern thought. Then came the Iranian Revolution, which aroused passionate enthusiasm in Indonesia despite traditional disdain for Shiism. Iran promised to show how a relatively large and powerful state could create a more just polity and economy by restoring Islam to the helm and rejecting secular government. Several years later, hundreds of young Indonesians found their way to Pakistan to train there for jihad against the Soviet Union next door in Afghanistan, an unprecedented transnational experience for Indonesian Muslims that led to the formation of Jemaah Islamiyah.

As a result of these and other developments, radical Muslim groups surfaced in some profusion when political controls relaxed after Soeharto's fall in 1998. Ensuing violent demonstrations, sectarian conflict and terrorist attacks scarred the first half-decade of the new democratic era. Though the initial radical momentum has now halted, and the terrorist upsurge has been wound back, several questions remain undecided. These include whether Indonesia's more or less secular national ideology will continue to command more support than the rival concept of an Islamic state, whether a majority of Indonesians will ever come to favour a global caliphate, and how tolerant the Indonesian government should be of movements that reject democracy. Reviewing HTI's history may help us find tentative answers to these questions.

Origins

HTI is the Indonesian branch of Hizbut Tahrir (to prevent confusion, the international organisation will be referred to by its unabbreviated name). This is a political party with a semi-global reach that aims to restore a caliphate for the whole Muslim world. Hizbut Tahrir was established in East Jerusalem in the early 1950s by a Palestinian judge, Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani (or, in Indonesian, Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, the romanisation I will use here). He was the first leader or *amir*, and his two successors have also been Palestinians. Hizbut Tahrir reached Indonesia in the early 1980s. The Indonesian pioneers were Abdullah bin Nuh, a cleric who ran an Islamic boarding school in West Java, and a son of his who had joined Hizbut Tahrir as a student in Jordan. Bin Nuh became acquainted with a former member of Lebanon's Hizbut Tahrir who had migrated to Australia, Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi, and invited him to move to his school (Rahmat 2005: 97–8). They gradually attracted recruits on several university campuses over the next decade and a half, particularly at the

Agricultural Institute in Bogor. The pioneers operated clandestinely. They trained their recruits through a system of 'cells' (*halqah*), avoided any mention of Hizbut Tahrir in their documents and waited until Soeharto's fall from power before coming out from the shadows. By then, younger leaders had surfaced. Their first major public occasion was a conference they hosted in Jakarta in May 2000 to advertise the goal of a caliphate. Either then or in 2001, they added 'Indonesia' to their party's name. Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia was born (Salim 2005: 146).

This change was not intended, however, to make the party autonomous or to limit its focus to Indonesia alone. HTI is probably the only Indonesian political organisation that is merely the local branch (or 'province') of an international movement, barring non-governmental organisations such as Transparency International. Reflecting this subordinate status, HTI calls its leadership committee the *Majlis* or *Lajnah al-Wilayah* (Arabic terms meaning 'province council' or 'committee') in internal communications. Publicly, it calls it the *Dewan Pimpinan Pusat* (DPP, or Central Leadership Council) (Rahmat 2005: 58–9; Salim 2005: 147), a standard Indonesian term.² As for its objective of merging an Islamic Indonesia into a worldwide caliphate, some other radical Muslim organisations admittedly have the same goal. But HTI brings a unique single-mindedness and passion to promoting this cause. It believes that 'the main challenge for Muslims is not upholding God's unity or rescuing Muslims from polytheism, but [deciding] how to establish the caliphate' (Arifin 2005: 138).

In other ways as well, HTI differs from most, if not all, other legal Indonesian political organisations. Though fully exploiting democratic freedoms, HTI still has several features of a conspiratorial or clandestine party. It will not, for example, fully disclose the composition of its leadership. One Indonesian researcher complained that, despite having interviewed several members of the 10-person central leadership council, he was unable to identify more than half its membership. He nonetheless found out that Hafidz Abdurrahman, born in 1971, had been HTI chair since 2004, having succeeded Muhammad al-Khaththath, who was born in 1964, in that post (Salim 2005: 147).³ Such discretion about the identity of party office-bearers, past and present, is rare in a culture which sets great store by titles and positions. Rather than the chair, it is the spokesperson, Ismail Yusanto, born in 1962, who is HTI's main interface with society, as well as being a key player on Hizbut Tahrir's international stage. For example, it was Yusanto who represented HTI at an international caliphate conference in Lakemba, New South Wales, in January 2007, and who chaired another one in Jakarta in August of that year.⁴ HTI also refuses to divulge the total size of its membership or to comment in detail on its dealings with the international headquarters (Fealy 2007: 158).

Government response

Why has all this secretiveness and non-conformity not prompted frequent public warnings from political leaders or security authorities about the need for vigilance towards HTI? After all, Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI, or Armed Forces of Indonesia) officers often rail against foreign conspiracies that threaten to weaken and break up Indonesia. One would expect HTI to be vulnerable. It does not conceal its hostility to Indonesian nationalism. Yusanto has asked:

Nationalism? What is nationalism? Nationalism has no basis. What is the basis of Indonesia? (Of) Malaysia? To be honest, we are more compatible with Malays, with Malaysia, than we are with Irian. They are Negroid [sic] ... Let's talk about the word 'fatherland'. What is a 'fatherland', anyway? It's just an abstract word that doesn't mean anything (quoted in Jamhari and Jahroni 2004: 187).

The reference here to the less 'compatible' Papuans seems particularly rash, given Jakarta's fears of Papuan secessionism. It is odd that the prospect, however remote, of Indonesia's absorption into a caliphate based perhaps thousands of kilometres away has not yet alarmed a political elite and state apparatus brought up to treat national sovereignty as a sacred legacy.

Several reasons for HTI's relative immunity from suspicion come to mind. First, as will be discussed below, HTI adamantly rejects violence on the part of its membership and, accordingly, unlike several other Muslim organisations, has not formed its own militia. HTI leaders also devote a lot of effort to cultivating mainstream parties and organisations. They mask their in-principle opposition to nationalism by the use of slogans like 'Save Indonesia with Islamic law and the caliphate' and by attacking separatism, a tactic that Laskar Jihad also used. To some interlocutors, Yusanto will say that the kind of nationalism HTI embraces is 'love of Indonesia' (Munabari 2008a). Second, Middle Eastern connections arouse less concern in Indonesia than Western links because they are usually deemed to carry no threat to Indonesia's territorial integrity or to the ownership of its natural resources. Laskar Jihad, for instance, was spared accusations of disloyalty or worse in 2002 when its leaders sought instructions about what action to take from their Middle Eastern clerical mentors. Indonesian Islam has, moreover, been bound for more than a century to the Islamic heartland in the Middle East through the pilgrimage, education and other ties seen as legitimate and benign.

It is, in fact, the West alone that is deemed to have predatory eyes on Indonesia. The Indonesian word for 'foreign', *asing*, is indeed often synonymous with the West or Westerners as in, for example, *Asing mempunyai agenda terhadap Islam*, which can be translated as 'The West has an anti-Islamic agenda'. A third reason is that, in democratic Indonesia, no consensus has developed on how to define what a subversive Muslim political ideology might be. There is generally more anxiety about the threats to order that theologically

‘deviant’ Muslim movements, such as Ahmadiyah, might pose, even if they lack any political goals. Fourth, in the absence of one or two near-majority parties, multiparty government has been unavoidable in Indonesia since 1998, and governing coalitions have always found it wise to include some Muslim parties in their ranks. Political leaders such as President Yudhoyono and Megawati, his predecessor, have often chosen to ignore provocations from Muslim organisations rather than risk a backlash that could have a negative impact either on coalition stability or on future electoral prospects.

Ideology: the caliphate

An-Nabhani, Hizbut Tahrir’s founder, was a prolific writer whose works are still the most important source for HTI’s ideas. And ideas matter for HTI. Hafidz Abdurrahman said in 2005:

What makes HTI different from any other group or political party is that HTI is an organisation that is bound by its ideas. All its members, wherever they are, are committed to and bound by these ideas or ideology. Ideas and thought are . . . what determine the life and death of our struggle (quoted in Salim 2005: 187).

This outlook suits a vanguard party focused on recruiting and training well-educated cadres, but it will be harder to maintain if Indonesia’s vast, diverse Muslim community is ever won over to the cause of a caliphate.

An-Nabhani taught that there were three all-encompassing ideologies: Islam, capitalism and socialism. Islam is superior to the others because it accommodates the need to believe in God that is, an-Nabhani asserted, innate in all humans. Capitalism subsumes secularism, pluralism, liberalism and democracy, while socialism is based on materialism. Christianity is not on the same plane as these ideologies, since it is merely a religion most of whose adherents advocate, as good secularists, the separation of religion and the state. It is not the Christian faith but capitalism and capitalist-imperialist states that arouse HTI’s most intense hatred. As for socialism or communism, they now no longer pose any menace (Hizbut Tahrir 2002: 60–7). Israel is also detested, not least because of Hizbut Tahrir’s Palestinian origins and leadership. Yet HTI holds out the promise of a peaceful and prosperous existence in the future caliphate to Christians and Jews. Yusanto reminded Indonesians recently that it was Islam’s centuries-long generosity to non-Muslims in the Islamic world that had eventually allowed an Egyptian Copt, Boutros-Ghali, to rise to be secretary general of the United Nations and a Christian Iraqi, Tariq Aziz, to become his country’s deputy prime minister (Yusanto 2008).

Born in 1909, an-Nabhani lived through the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 and Israel’s creation in the land of his birth. He grew to believe that the caliphate’s disappearance had plunged the Muslim world into

disunity and impiety. Rule by a caliph was the form of leadership that the Prophet Muhammad had bequeathed to the Muslim community, and consequently was the only form of leadership or government that accorded with Islamic law.

In his book, *Negara Islam* ('The Islamic state'), an-Nabhani did not blind himself to various shortcomings in the successive caliphates in the history of Islam. The Damascus-based Umayyads had improperly turned the caliphate into a dynasty. Caliphs should be elected, an-Nabhani argued, by the council of the Muslim community (*majlis umat*). The Baghdad-based Abbasids had given too much autonomy to provincial governors, which provoked disunity. The caliphate was not to be a federation but a unitary state, an-Nabhani wrote, in which the caliph would have a very wide range of functions no matter how vast his territory was. As for the Istanbul-based Ottomans, they had relied unduly on military power, and had oppressed the Arabs (an-Nabhani 2000: 243–7).⁵

While acknowledging these imperfections, however, an-Nabhani reserved his harshest words for the capitalist West that had eventually become, in his view, the caliphate's main enemy. Crucially, the West had sought to combat Islam by concocting the creed of nationalism and prompting Muslim peoples to rebel in its name against Ottoman rule. In his account of the events leading to the abolition of the caliphate, an-Nabhani depicted Mustafa Kemal as just a creature of the British. In reality, of course, Kemal had been one of the Allies' most formidable adversaries, whom the British had even tried to assassinate through the agency of an Indian Muslim, Mustafa Saghir, whom the Turks hanged. An-Nabhani seemingly projected onto the British his own belief that the caliphate alone guaranteed the Muslim community's strength and unity, so that terminating it had ineluctably become the main goal of Britain's post-war Middle Eastern policy (an-Nabhani 2000: 302; Mango 2002: 313).

HTI sources claim that the British forced Kemal to accept four conditions in the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Lausanne before they would recognise the new Turkish state. These conditions were the abolition of the caliphate, the expulsion of the Ottoman family from Turkey, the seizure of the family's possessions and the declaration of a secular Turkish state (Wadjdi 2007: 9). These alleged conditions cannot be reconciled with the chronology of events from 1922 to 1924. They sit uneasily, too, with the fact that the Allies invited to Lausanne both Kemal and the by then powerless Ottoman Sultan's representatives. Kemal ignored that tactic, which was an example of the well-known British penchant for shoring up and playing hereditary rulers off against upstart nationalist leaders. Indeed, the last Sultan and penultimate Caliph, Mehmet VI, fled Istanbul under British protection (Mango 2002: 356, 365).

Putting aside the issue of the veracity of historical data, however, we see that the HTI charge sheet against the West is a long one. The West created the capitalist system, nationalism, secularism and democracy, all of which played havoc with Islamic societies; it masterminded the overthrow of the caliphate,

paving the way for the break-up of the Muslim world into myriad, pseudo-independent states that remained prey to imperialist exploitation; and it created the state of Israel on Muslim land.

Ideology: democracy and related issues

An-Nabhani's successor as *amir*, Abdul Qadim Zallum, wrote that, without a state, Islam's existence as an ideology would end and it would be reduced to a series of ritual ceremonies and certain character traits (Zallum 2002: 9–11). The Prophet built his state in Medina solely on the basis of the Islamic creed. An Islamic state or caliphate therefore must not embrace any concept concerning life or law that does not spring from the Islamic creed. It must reject the entire ideological complex of capitalist democracy because it did not originate in Islam, Zallum wrote (2002: 10). The constituent parts of this complex include liberalism, secularism, pluralism, nationalism and patriotism. The foundation of liberalism is the separation of religion and the state, and its corollary that man can regulate his own life. This conflicts with Islam, in which God is the only lawgiver. Liberalism nurtures individual freedom, including freedom of religion. It encourages a fatal misreading of the Koran. The verse 'There is no compulsion in religion' (Al-Baqarah: 256) is misinterpreted to mean, Zallum continued, that people can choose any religion they wish, or even choose not to have a religion (2002: 11). This is far removed from its true meaning, namely that Muslims will not force non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Liberalism also spawns immorality and decadence by giving individuals complete freedom of choice.

As for pluralism, it sanctifies the belief that truth is relative, and that all religions are true. If this were the case, there would be no point in establishing an Islamic state (Hizbut Tahrir 2002: 61–2). In the caliphate, these ills which are inseparable from capitalist democracy will have no place. Laws will be derived exclusively from the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet. No organisation will be permitted that is not based on the Islamic creed. Thus all parties will be Muslim parties.

Building support: the first two stages

HTI has a three-stage program, as laid down by Hizbut Tahrir, for the achievement of an Islamic state, the preliminary step before the caliphate. The stages are the recruitment of members, the interaction with society and the 'taking' or 'accepting' of power. This is based on how the Prophet is reported to have sought to spread the message of Islam in Mecca before his migration to Medina. HTI focused on the first stage during its clandestine existence when it developed its 'cell' (*halqah*) network. Since 2000, HTI has been openly 'interacting' with society, seeking to persuade the Muslim community as a whole of the need for a caliphate.

Crucially, jihad is *not* an option in this stage. Former HTI chair al-Khaththath has pointed out that the word 'jihad' has two connotations. Linguistically, it means 'to deploy all one's strength and energy'. Its meaning in Islamic law, by contrast, is 'war against infidels'. The latter kind of jihad can be defensive or offensive. It is the former when a Muslim populace resists invasion and occupation, as in Afghanistan, Iraq and Israel. Offensive jihad is, according to al-Khaththath, 'usually' carried out by an 'Islamic Caliphate State' (al-Khaththath 2006: 7). That state will spread the message of Islam to infidel countries. If the latter physically resist this missionary or propaganda activity, the state must fight to protect its missionary activity and remove any physical obstacles. The Prophet undertook this form of jihad after establishing an Islamic state in Medina. In accordance, then, with the Prophet's precedent, the Muslim community should first restore the caliphate, which will, in turn, fight against the domination of the United States and its imperialist allies over the Muslim world. In other words, caliphate first, only then armed jihad, with the exception of Muslim countries already fighting invasion and occupation.⁶

If jihad is thus excluded, what remains is a sustained, peaceful campaign to convince Indonesia's Muslim population of the need for a caliphate—a non-violent way of achieving a revolutionary outcome. HTI finds its readiest allies among those organisations that advocate the imposition of Islamic law, but its outreach goes much further. HTI's monthly journal, *al-Wa'ie*, carries articles by, or interviews with, a wide spectrum of politicians, academics and clerics, not all of whom by any means support the imposition of Islamic law, much less the caliphate. Many of the people courted in this way offer, at best, pro forma approval of the caliphate as an objective. In an interview in March 2006, former People's Consultative Assembly chair Amien Rais, for example, called on HTI to adapt its approach to Indonesia's pluralist context—which is, in fact, the polar opposite of HTI's strategy (Rais 2006: 36). Forestry Minister and general chair of the Muslim Star and Crescent Party, M.S. Ka'ban (2007: 56), wrote elliptically that the caliphate was HTI's 'brand', while his party's 'brand' was Islamic law and that the two should complement each other. Youth and Sport Minister Adhyaksa Dault wrote that God alone had the right to decide when the caliphate would arise (Dault 2007: 70). He added that nobody should think that those advocating a caliphate were against the government, thereby ignoring the magazine's vitriolic anti-government stance. Two months earlier, it had condemned the Yudhoyono administration as an 'imperialist compradore' (al-Khaththath 2007: 8). Din Syamsuddin, chair of the mainstream Muhammadiyah organisation, likewise took a non-committal approach at a 2007 rally where he was a guest speaker. While recognising the merits of a caliphate, he said contradictorily that Indonesians should only advocate it within the framework of the national, unitary state of Indonesia.⁷ Yet it is precisely that state which will disappear if HTI achieves its goal.

While it would therefore be wise not to overstate HTI's success in winning support for a caliphate, its association with prominent mainstream figures no doubt enhances its legitimacy. In other ways, too, its influence has grown. It is active in the

MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, or Indonesian Council of the Ulama) and for several years was also an influential player in the FUI (Forum Umat Islam, or Islamic Community Forum). The first is a partly government-funded body that has taken an increasingly hard-line stance against the familiar evils of pluralism, liberalism and secularism, as well as 'deviant' Muslim sects, most notably Ahmadiyah. The second, the FUI, is a front of a score or so of Muslim organisations formed to support the MUI's illiberal decisions. Most of the organisations in the FUI advocate the constitutional adoption of Islamic law, and some also support a caliphate.

Achieving power: the third stage

After gaining the support of a, so far unspecified, portion of Indonesia's Muslim community, HTI will move to the third stage of its strategy, the 'taking' or 'accepting' of power. As noted above, this is derived from how the Prophet spread the message of Islam in Mecca. He adopted an approach of 'seeking help' from certain power holders in the state (known in Arabic as *thalabun nusrat* or *nushrah*). Muhammad sought the assistance of various tribal leaders in Mecca before he moved or migrated (*hijrah*) to Medina. The latter, while an important concept for jihadi organisations, did not play a role in an-Nabhani's theorising. Muhammad's biography, rather than the Koran or his sayings, seems to be the main source for *thalabun nusrat*. Muhammad reportedly spent three years in this activity, visiting over 40 tribes.⁸

The concept of *thalabun nusrat* has important ramifications for HTI. Muhammad used persuasion rather than force to win over tribal leaders. This precedent is the source for HTI's rejection of force in the establishment of an Islamic state. Outside Indonesia, critics of Hizbut Tahrir, such as the former British activist Ed Husain, have to the contrary predicted that the 'seeking help' tactic would take the form of a military coup. He even quoted his Hizbut Tahrir recruiter as saying: 'We will deliver the Islamic state through a military coup . . . Our members orchestrated coups in the 1960s and 1970s in several countries, but the time was not yet ripe. Now it is ripe' (Husain 2007: 93, 98). It is understandable that *thalabun nusrat* raises suspicions. A concept borrowed from the reported circumstances of 14 centuries ago seems nebulous or opaque today. As HTI rejects democracy and electoral participation, it cannot be voted into power. History provides few other models than elections, coups or revolutions for transferring power. One author cites Hizbut Tahrir sources in the Middle East claiming that, if Muslims combine against the regime in power, removing it by military force would not be a violent act (Taji-Farouki 1996: 104).

HTI, violence and non-violence

At the current second stage, however, HTI adheres to non-violence. Yusanto has said that 'in spreading its message, HTI holds to one fundamental principle,

non-violence. To change people through violence will never succeed' (Salim 2005: 50). HTI's abjuring of violence distinguishes it from most other radical Muslim organisations, such as the Front Pembela Islam (FPI, or Islamic Defender Front), founded in 1998, which carries out raids on bars and other dens of vice, particularly during the fasting month. The FPI, an important member of the FUI, caused widespread outrage on 1 June 2008 when some of its members attacked a group of activists at the National Monument in Jakarta who were preparing a demonstration in support of Ahmadiyah (ICG 2008). Several of the latter were hospitalised. The FPI chair, Habib Rizieq, was given an 18-month sentence for his role in this incident. A former human rights lawyer, Munarman, who is formally only a trainee HTI member but has a high profile, was also put on trial for his involvement (ICG 2008; Munabari 2008a).

HTI itself was elsewhere that day, demonstrating peacefully against fuel price rises. The National Monument incident nevertheless had serious repercussions for it. In late August, fearing that the connection with the FUI was besmirching HTI's reputation for non-violence, Hizbut Tahrir's *amir* insisted that HTI break off its ties with the FUI and avoid coalitions with other organisations. Ensconced in his post as FUI secretary general, al-Khaththath rejected the *amir*'s decision and was expelled from HTI (Munabari 2008a). Not surprisingly, HTI kept the embarrassing story of its immediate past chair's expulsion out of the mainstream media, losing thereby a fresh opportunity to proclaim its policy of non-violence. But this policy, in fact, applies only to HTI itself and, as noted above, only until the caliphate is established. Once Muhammad had established an 'Islamic state' in Medina, he no longer relied on persuasion alone to expand Muslim territory. An-Nabhani's draft constitution specified that certain states, such as colonial powers, would be 'legally' at war with the caliphate and that diplomatic relations with them would be forbidden. It would be incumbent on the caliphate, moreover, to wage war on those states actually at war with it. The caliphate would also spread the message of Islam to regions outside its borders, by jihad or peaceful means (ICG 2003; Taji-Farouki 1996: 215).

The *amir*'s intervention in HTI may in time have other repercussions for its policy of non-violence, but hitherto it has not been HTI's practice to condemn violence carried out by other Muslim organisations or Muslim individuals if it considers the cause just. Its website gave sympathetic coverage to FPI chair Rizieq during his trial. In early 2008, 300 HTI activists demonstrated in Bandung, calling for the Danish cartoonist who had insulted the Prophet to be put to death (Gatra 2008). These demonstrators were echoing a similar call that al-Khaththath made in October 2006 in his capacity as FUI secretary general (*al-Wa'ie* 2007). If a Scandinavian or other infidel cartoonist were to be murdered, HTI might well applaud the crime, but the murderer is unlikely to be an HTI member. Finally, it should be noted, HTI may well reject *acts* of violence but it does not eschew violent *rhetoric*. Its language is indeed often vitriolic as it denounces the enemies of Islam, the indigenous servants of capitalism and imperialism, or the assorted social ills those forces have inflicted on Indonesia. In

a typical statement, on the eve of the passage of a bill on pornography, Yusanto called on the government, the security organs and the whole of society to declare 'war' on pornography to eradicate the phenomenon completely from Indonesia (Prihadiyoko 2008). (That bill, passed in amended form at the end of October 2008, was rejected by five provinces—Bali, North Sulawesi, Yogyakarta, East Nusatenggara and West Papua—on the grounds of its being 'anti-pluralist'.)

HTI and terrorism

What is HTI's attitude towards terrorism? A prominent US-based critic of Hizbut Tahrir, Zeyno Baran, has described it as a 'conveyor-belt for terrorism'. She wrote that: 'It [Hizbut Tahrir] indoctrinates individuals with radical ideology, priming them for recruitment by more extreme organisations where they can take part in actual operations' (Baran 2005: 68). Without seeking to assess this judgement on the global Hizbut Tahrir movement as a whole, I consider it unjustified as far as HTI is concerned. I have examined some 150 police interrogation reports of terrorist detainees and their associates, and have found no ex-member of HTI in these reports. There are admittedly gaps in our knowledge of the education and background of Indonesian terrorists. There may also be ex-HTI members who have joined a jihadi organisation without so far falling into police hands. On the other hand, HTI is far from being the only place aspiring Indonesian terrorists can go to in order to acquire a radical ideology.

Moreover, it is likely that pro-jihad Indonesians despise HTI and reject its ideology. The website *almuhajirun.com*, run by one or two former HTI activists, posted an 'Open Letter to HTI' on 9 August 2007 that summarises what are probably widespread views of HTI in the jihadi community (*Almuhajirun.com* 2007). Its author accused HTI of having 'hijacked' the goal of a caliphate, as if it were the only organisation working towards it. He claimed that HTI had mistakenly imposed unnecessary limits and conditions on the means of fighting for the caliphate. One such limitation was the insistence that the caliphate struggle had to proceed by way of 'seeking help'. The writer argued that Muhammad's use of this tactic merely showed it was *permitted*, not that it was *obligatory*. It was a tactic of the weak and, once the Prophet had acquired sufficient strength following the *hijrah* to Medina, he never sought to win over tribal leaders again. Is today's Muslim community, he went on to ask, facing the same conditions as Muhammad did, when it is one billion strong? If the Prophet had had as many followers in Mecca as the hundreds of thousands (*sic*) of HTI members, would he have resorted to this tactic?

The Open Letter further claimed that mistaken opinions prevented HTI from having a correct attitude towards 'impious' (*thoghut*) rulers in Muslim lands and prompted them to cooperate with the armies in such lands, in this case TNI. This probably refers to HTI's occasional cultivation of retired TNI officers, such as former TNI commander Wiranto, or Soeharto's ex-son-in-law, Prabowo. It

also helps undermine any strategy of 'seeking help' from armed forces to take power. Finally, the writer dismissed the HTI argument that jihad was only permissible after the caliphate had been formed.

This critique dovetails with the views found in *Menabur jihad menuai terror* ('Sowing jihad, reaping terror', Damanhuri 2005), a comprehensive, semi-scholarly apologia for Jemaah Islamiyah's bombing operations that was written in 2005. This text acknowledged, as if with HTI in mind, that God had indeed forbidden the Prophet throughout his years of proselytisation in Mecca to make war on the pagans and others who harassed him and his companions. But then, it explained, new verses were revealed. First, it became permitted for Muslims to defend themselves, and then it became mandatory to do so. Later, with the advent of further verses, it became mandatory for Muslims to make war on all non-believers, even if they themselves did not commit aggression against Muslims, until they were prepared to convert to Islam or at least pay a poll tax (Damanhuri 2005: 73–5). This is far removed from HTI's nebulous vision of 'seeking help'.

Rather than endorsing offensive jihad in today's conditions, HTI usually denies any Muslim involvement. Just as it blames the caliphate's dissolution on the West, its presumed beneficiary, HTI claims that the 9/11 attacks were carried out to justify the prospective global War on Terror. The 'evidence' that its publications borrow from American conspiracy theorists includes such 'facts' as there were no Arab names on the passenger manifests; the plane that hit the Pentagon was carrying a missile and was hence a military plane; one of the planes was observed not to have any windows and was thus a cargo plane; nine of those accused of hijacking the aircraft are still alive; and explosives were stored in both towers of the World Trade Center. The purpose of the attacks was to prepare the American public for the 2002 National Defense Strategy and pre-emptive war (*al-Wa'ie* CD Database Interaktif 2006). The global War on Terror that began as a result of the attacks is just, in HTI's view, a mask for the West's perennial war on Islam.⁹

HTI treats Indonesia's own experience with terrorism in the same way. Although Indonesian terrorists are alleged to be fighting against the United States, Yusanto noted in 2005, they have curiously not managed to hit any important US target, which raises the question of who might really be behind Indonesian terrorism. He said that a very clever intelligence operation was underway, infiltrating agents into Muslim groups to have them adopt the mistaken doctrine of jihad and martyrdom, all so as to prove that Indonesia was a haven for terrorists.¹⁰ Another HTI leadership council member, M.R. Kurnia, explained in 2008 why fresh arrests of terrorists were then taking place. It was all because the Muslim community had come together to oppose the Ahmadiyah movement, and because support for the imposition of Islamic law was increasing, some surveys showing that as many as 74 percent of Indonesians endorsed it. Naturally, Kurnia said, anti-Islamic people were now apprehensive.¹¹ Without quite accusing Australia of carrying out the Bali bombing of 2002, al-Khaththath has written in a similar vein that the attack

legitimised Australia's counterterrorist assistance to the Indonesian police, which set up in consequence a special anti-terror detachment, Densus 88 (al-Khaththath 2007: 8). HTI held a demonstration two days after the bombing of the Australian Embassy in September 2004, in which it denounced terror while urging caution in trying to link the bombing with any Muslim movement.

By not defending bombing that targets infidels, and alleging that terrorist acts serve the West's anti-Islamic campaign, HTI is not acting as a 'conveyor-belt for terrorism', but is, oddly enough, helping to delegitimise Muslim terrorists by portraying them as misguided or, worse, possible Western stooges. Moreover, its doctrine on jihad throws HTI open to the jihadis' charge that it only produces 'talkers, not doers, and that anyone who waits for the re-emergence of the caliphate to wage jihad will be waiting a very long time' (ICG 2008: 12n58).

HTI and the future

While HTI is undoubtedly still very much a minority movement, assessing its precise strength is no easy matter. Although there has been an enormous growth in opinion polling in Indonesia since 1998, poll results are often very confusing and contradictory. In the course of 2006, for example, Indonesia's most reputable agency, the Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI, or Indonesia Survey Institute), found that support for HTI had soared from 3.3 percent early in the year to 7.2 percent several months later. This seems quite implausible and, unfortunately, no later polling is available. Rather than evidence of a sudden expansion of HTI's support base, it rather points to the unreliability of many survey findings.¹²

As noted above, HTI refuses to release its membership figures. As long as it renounces participation in elections, which would compromise its ideology, voting statistics will also be unavailable as a guide to its strength. Though it does not rebuff all approaches by researchers, HTI is unlikely to allow outsiders to undertake surveys of its membership that might tell us its size, its urban-rural balance or the extent it remains campus-based. What it does not try to hide, by contrast, is that it imposes strict discipline on its membership, as al-Khaththath's fate shows. It seems also clear that HTI's outreach to mainstream politicians and organisations is effective in enhancing its legitimacy, and that its view of the world provides a compelling 'meta-narrative' for its supporters (Fealy 2007: 161). HTI's strategy, combining radical ideology, vitriolic rhetoric and non-violent action, is a formidable one that may allow it to continue growing in a country where 62 percent of Indonesians have said that the West is bad for the Muslim community (Lembaga Survei Indonesia 2006). But its members will have to be exceptionally patient and steadfast given that their objective is so ambitious and that there is no evidence that it can be soon achieved.

What of the prospects of Indonesia evolving into an Islamic state, whether or not as a step towards creating a caliphate? The first part of the answer to this question is that, while two or three Muslim parties in the national parliament

support the adoption of Islamic law (*syariah*), which can be considered synonymous with the declaration of an Islamic state, political opposition to this goal is overwhelming. Yet public attitudes are harder to read because of conflicting survey results. For example, a survey carried out in May 2008 found that 56 percent of young people in Jakarta supported *syariah* by-laws while at the same time rejecting any change in Indonesia's national ideology of Pancasila (*Jakarta Post* 2008a). Later that year, another survey found that over 58 percent of teachers of Islam supported the *syariah*-prescribed punishment of stoning for various crimes and amputation for thieves (Khalik 2008). A survey of mosque managers found in January 2009 that over 88 percent in Jakarta supported Pancasila, while 31 percent also endorsed Islamic criminal law (Wardany 2009). Contradictory though these and other survey results on this issue are, they suggest that HTI has a long road ahead of it if it sees gaining majority public support as a precondition for taking power.

As long as it adheres to its non-violent strategy, HTI is likely to benefit from continuing government tolerance. The Yudhoyono government, like its predecessors, has not developed a strategy for containing radical Muslim or other organisations, even where they have had armed militias which threaten the state's monopoly of force. No political organisation has been banned since 1998, not even Jemaah Islamiyah, the latter allegedly because it is not a registered organisation. Ironically, if secular nationalist candidates like Megawati and Yudhoyono continue to be elected to the presidency, it seems likely that fear of being criticised as 'anti-Muslim' will result in their avoiding harsh measures against movements such as HTI which oppose democracy and its associated values. Nonetheless, HTI's goal is too far removed from traditional Indonesian national aspirations for any future process of 'seeking help' to gain power not to arouse widespread opposition. But this outcome could be many years away.

Notes

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- 1. All translations from Indonesian are the author's.
- 2. Salim (2005: 147) calls the council or committee *majlis*, while Rahmat (2005: 58) and Munabari (2008b: 12) call it *lajnah*, as does Taji-Farouki (1996: 117). The latter writer, who has published the most systematic study of Hizbut Tahrir, says that Hizbut Tahrir's 'sphere of operation is divided into "provinces", defined by the leadership committee as "every land in which there is a government". Party documents stress that this decision is for administrative facility only and insist that the sphere of operation comprises an organic whole' (Taji-Farouki 1996: 117). She adds that provinces can coincide with nation states or with a particular region within a nation state.
- 3. By reading HTI's monthly journal, *al-Wa'ie*, and the website <<http://hizbut-tahrir.or.id>>, I have found it possible to determine the names of up to eight members of the leadership council. As a consequence, no doubt, of HTI's secretiveness, there is some disagreement among Indonesian sources about the identity of HTI's leader. Rahmat (2005: 59) reports that

- the *amir* appoints the overall head of HTI, but that neither his identity nor his title is publicised. Munabari (2008a) says that the leader—called *mu'tamad*, a term Taji-Farouki (1996: 118–9) also uses—is '85 percent likely' to be identical to the chair. He also reports Yusanto as saying that it is unimportant who the leader is (Munabari 2008b: 12).
4. Rahmat (2005: 59) mentions that HTI cannot communicate directly with other national Hizbut Tahrir branches, but must go through the Jordan-based leadership.
 5. These were not the only caliphates in Islamic history. For further details, see Hourani (1992: 489–90).
 6. Al-Khaththath's successor, Hafidz Abdurrahman, wrote even less ambiguously on the HTI website in November 2008 that an offensive jihad could only be declared by a caliph. This was HTI's first response to the 10 November execution of the Bali bombers, Amrozi, Imam Samudra and Mukhlas. See <<http://hizbut-tahrir.or.id/2008/11/12/pr-pasca-eksekusi-amrozi-dkk/>>.
 7. Based on my field notes of the speeches at the rally discussed here.
 8. See <<http://hizbut-tahrir.or.id/2008/08/18/thalab-an-nushrah/>>, August 2008.
 9. Not all Indonesian radical Muslim organisations deny al-Qaeda's role in 9/11. In an interview in February 2002, FPI chair Habib Rizieq told me that the attacks proved that Muslims were both 'brave and clever'.
 10. See <<http://feks-dpr.or.id/main.php?op=isi&id=587&kunci=ismail yusanto>>, December 2005.
 11. See <<http://hizbut-tahrir.or.id/2008/07/06/mr-kurnia-isu-terorisme-untuk-membendung-arus/>>, July 2008.
 12. The LSI reported in March 2006 that 12.1 percent of Indonesians had heard of HTI but only 3.3 percent supported it (Lembaga Survei Indonesia 2006). The LSI reported in October 2006 that HTI's support rate was 7.2 percent (see <<http://www.lsi.or.id/liputan/177/survey-reveals-muslim-ambivalence-on-terrorism>>). It is highly unlikely that HTI's public approval rating really jumped over 100 percent in seven months in the absence of dramatic political or other circumstances. The March 2006 survey produced other strange findings. It showed that support for the stoning of adulterers had reached 39 percent in 2001, risen further to 55 percent in 2005 and fallen back to 48 percent in 2006. Moreover, over 17 percent of Indonesians supported Jemaah Islamiyah, a figure above the proportion of Indonesians backing most presidential candidates.

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