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**The Aceh-based Militant Network:
A Trigger for a View into the
Insightful Complex of Conceptual
and Historical Links**

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ABSTRACT

During February- April 2010 a militant network, known as Tandzim Al Qaeda Serambi Mekah, was discovered by the Indonesian police. Assessments and analyses that followed it pointed to a change or a shift in the strategic and operational thought made by this Aceh-based militant network, including a change in prioritizing of targets, namely prioritizing of “enemies” as targets for attack. This article asks to offer varied insights into the strategic and operational thought of this network by viewing it through both universal and local lenses. It is done by using a broader historical perspective that addresses global militant discourse, originated in the Middle East in particular, and the case of Darul Islam (DI) rebellions in Indonesia of the late 1940s to the early 1960s, that is considered to be significant for understanding of current jihadism in Indonesia. In this way the discussed case of the Aceh-based militant network is seen to suggest also a reminder that the multi-faceted contours of Islamic radicalism and militancy in Indonesia tend to be revealed more clearly through a view that catches both the Indonesian local context and the global context, the Middle Eastern in particular; a view that requires a careful navigation between the universalities of the global aspects and the particularities of the local Indonesian context.

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The Aceh-based Militant Network: A Trigger for a View into the Insightful Complex of Conceptual and Historical Links

Radical Muslims in Indonesia share ideological tenets, beliefs, spirit, rhetoric, organizational structures, operational and strategic thought with their counterparts worldwide, in the Middle East in particular. They drink with them from the same ideological well through reading, for example, the same founding radical texts that many of them have been translated to Indonesian. They are also inspired, the same as many radicals worldwide, by the same collective memory of formative events in the global *jihad*, such as in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Iraq.¹ However, Islamic radicalism in Indonesia is not a mere replica of a “global” Islamic radicalism and has not been left untouched by the imprint of the local context as well.

In February–April 2010, a new militant network, including its training camp in Aceh, has been discovered through a series of raids in Aceh and in Java by the Indonesian police. Its leader, Dulmatin, considered to be one of Southeast Asia’s most wanted terrorists, was among those members of the network who were killed in these raids. This article asks to offer varied insights into this new militant network that is related to ideology and strategic and operational thought. It will be done by viewing this network through both universal and local lenses and by using a broader historical perspective that addresses the radical, militant discourse in the Middle East and the case of the militant *jihadi* antecedent, the Darul Islam (DI) rebellions in Indonesia of the late 1940s to the early 1960s.

Though the case of the Aceh-based militant network was largely covered by the media and some media reports even made headlines both inside and outside Indonesia, this paper refers only to elements of strategic and operational thought, plans and intentions relating to this network, which appear in the report of the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) titled “Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in

* The author of this article wishes to thank Sidney Jones for her helpful and encouraging comments.

¹ See “Radical Islam in the Middle East and Southeast Asia: A comparison.” In *Conflict, Community, and Criminality in Southeast Asia and Australia: Assessment from the Field* (A report of the CSIS Transnational Threats Project), edited by Arnaud de Borchgrave, Thomas Sanderson and David Gordon (Center for Strategic and International Studies CSIS: Washington, D.C., June 2009), pp. 2–5.

Aceh”², and in an article by Sidney Jones, Senior Adviser for the ICG’s Asia Program in Jakarta, titled “Terrorism: What we have learned from Aceh”.³

Background: Newly observed shift in strategic and operational thought

The discussed Aceh-based militant network identified itself as *Tanzim Al Qaeda Serambi Mekah*⁴ or alternatively as “al-Qaida in Aceh”. In the abovementioned report of the ICG,⁵ this network is described as a major mutation in Indonesian *jihadi* ranks, which includes men from a number of organizations. Therefore, this network has become known as *lintas tanzim*, or “across organizations”. As a new coalition of organizations, it is said to search for a more coherent strategy for *jihad* in Indonesia, while rejecting the approach of both Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the network of Noordin Mohammed Top, which was led by him until his death in September 2009. The JI, the best-known *jihadi* organization in the region, has been perceived by the discussed new *jihadi* coalition to become too passive by abandoning *jihad* for *dakwah*.⁶ As to the network of Noordin Mohammed Top, a more violent splinter group of JI that focused on the carrying out suicide bombings to terrorize the U.S. and its allies, it is argued to be perceived by the new network as having no long-term vision.⁷

According to this ICG’s report, the new militant network shaped an agenda for applying *shari‘a*, the Islamic law, through *jihad*. The first key step toward that agenda

² International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*, Asia Report no. 189 (Jakarta/Brussels: ICG, 20 April 2010), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/189-indonesia-jihadi-surprise-in-aceh.aspx> (last accessed: June 25, 2010). See also International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia: The Dark Side of Jama‘ah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT)*, Crisis Group Asia Briefing no. 107 (Jakarta/Brussels: ICG, 6 July 2010), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B107-indonesia-the-dark-side-of-jamaah-ansharut-tauhid-jat.aspx>

³ Sidney Jones, “Terrorism: What we have learned from Aceh”, *Tempo*, March 11, 2010—see it in the website of ICG, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/sidney-terrorism-what-we-have-learned-from-aceh.aspx#> (last accessed: 27 June 2010).

⁴ The Province of Aceh is known as *Serambi Mekah* (literally, “the Veranda to Mecca”).

⁵ ICG, *Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*.

⁶ Arabic: *da‘wa*. This term has varied connotations. Among the most common definitions of this term: Preaching of Islam.

⁷ See ICG, *Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*, pp. I, 1.

was a development of a secure base that could become a place of refuge as well as a base for operations; Aceh was chosen for that purpose as the secure base, “*qoidah aminah*”.⁸ The development of such a secure base was perceived by leaders of the network as a significant way of establishing the nucleus of an Islamic state. The second step was performing military training so that trained members of the network would have the capacity to guard the secure base from enemy attacks. The third step was *dakwah* activity, focused on the area within the secure base, for increasing the support given by the community. According to this agenda, attacks would only take place within the base area on *thaghut*;⁹ civilian officials and security forces who were considered to be obstacles to the application of Islamic law, including Western civilians who were spreading secular thought. In other words, leaders of this network, according to the ICG’s report, adopted a new approach saying that the enemy should be defined not simply as anyone from the U.S. or allied countries, but as anyone who obstructed the application of the Islamic law. Furthermore, the change or the shift in the strategic thought, as it was expressed in the agenda of new network, also included a decision that Noordin Top-style *infijjar*, namely bombings, would be replaced by *ightiyalat*, assassinations, to reduce the controversy generated by deaths of Muslims on one hand and increase recruitment possibilities on the other.¹⁰ Consequently, it is assessed in the report that “many Indonesian officials were high on the list”¹¹, namely as targets.

It can also be learnt from this report of the ICG that the shift in strategic and operational thought was largely inspired by the writings of the Palestinian-Jordanian cleric and radical ideologue, Abu Muhammad al-Maqqisi (more fully, Abu

⁸ In a correct Arabic transliteration: *qa’ida amina*.

⁹ The correct Arabic transliteration is *taghut* (plural: *tawaghit*). The literary meaning of *taghut* is idol, false god. This Koranic term is often used in radical Islamic discourse for denouncing rulers and regimes in the Muslim world who wrongly claim to sovereignty, though it belongs to God only, and for making themselves an object of worship. Radical Muslims also use this term for describing such rulers and regimes as tyrant, or despot. See for example, Dekmejian, R. Hrair, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1985), p. 93; Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 256; Roy, Oliver, *The Failure of Political Islam*. Trans. by Carol Volk from the French (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 41–42.

¹⁰ See ICG, *Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*, pp. I-II, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. II.

Muhammad ‘Isam al-Maqdisi). He is considered to have been the mentor of the Iraq-based militant Islamist leader, Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi, but broke away from him in 2004. Starting to criticize the tactics used by al-Zarqawi in Iraq, al-Maqdisi suggested, among other things, to replace what he termed as Zarqawi’s method of *qital nikayah* (literally, fighting to cause damage), by weakening the enemy through repeated attacks, by what he termed as *qital tamkin* (literally, fighting to consolidate power), to establish Islamic law. He sustained his argument by explaining, among other things, that when *qital nikayah* was waged, in particular among majority Muslim populations, it brought suffering to the community and often legitimized the enemy’s retaliation. *Qital tamkin*, by contrast, could lay according to him a basis for an Islamic state. But it had to be preceded by the establishment of a secure base from which to operate and an organization that could control this secure base, apply the Islamic law and serve as a proto-government. He argued that such a base had to be established in an area with the potential for both strong community support and guerrilla warfare. He also clarified that *dakwah* and *jihad* had to go hand in hand for *qital tamkin*. The Writings of Al-Maqdisi were also translated into Indonesian, have become popular among militants in the Indonesia archipelago and have even sparked internal debates and controversies within their circles.¹²

In an article that preceded the discussed ICG’s report, Sidney Jones argues that those who joined the new network represent a more militant stream of the extremist movement in Indonesia that identifies strongly with al-Qaeda and seeks to build on the legacy of Noordin.¹³ As to the issue of the definition of the enemy, or prioritizing of targets that is salient in the case of discussed network, she views it through a broader time scale of the last decade. Jones says that extremists in Indonesia have changed and broadened their definition of the enemy over time. At the height of the Ambon and Poso conflicts, in the beginning of the last decade, the enemy were

¹² See International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*, pp. I, 1–2, 5, 13. See also International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia: The Dark Side of Jama’ah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT)*, pp. 3–4; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah’s Publishing Industry*, Asia Report no. 147, (Jakarta/Brussels, ICG, 28 February 2008), pp. I-II, 1, 6–9, 11, 16, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/147-indonesia-jemaah-islamiyahs-publishing-industry.aspx> (last accessed 27 June 2010).

¹³ This observation does not seem to contradict the above mentioned criticism of Noordin’s network, among members of the new Aceh based network, for not having a long-term vision. In other words, such criticism and a motivation to continue Noordin's legacy can co-exist.

clearly local Christians; in Poso, this was expanded to include informers and government officials who were seen to be working against the *jihad*. According to her, the Bali bombs of October 2002 were the first indication for the adoption by Indonesian extremists of the definition of the enemy made by al-Qaeda; the U.S. and its allies as well as all citizens who paid taxes to support the war machines in those countries. Jones assesses that the focus may be moving back in the discussed case toward Indonesian officials, considered to be *taghut*, or tantamount to infidels, because of their alliance with the West, opposition to the *shari'a*, or policies that are considered generally as “un-Islamic”. She even reminds that in July 2009, the Noordin’s network was planning an attack on the Indonesia President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.¹⁴ She adds by saying that “it may be that now prominent officials are as high on the list of ideal targets as iconic buildings with internationally known brand names”.¹⁵

Insights suggested by a view to global militant discourse: The debate on the “near enemy” and the “far enemy”

Prioritizing of targets, or prioritizing of “enemies” as targets in the *jihad* as an armed struggle, is one of the salient debatable issues in the Islamic militant discourse of the recent decades. By using the terminology of the militant themselves, it can be defined as a debate on *al-‘adu al-qarib* (“the near enemy”), local regimes in Muslim countries alleged to be “infidel” by radical militants, and on *al-‘adu al-ba‘id* (“the far enemy”),

¹⁴ For this issue see also International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia: Noordin Top’s Support Base*, Crisis Group Asia Briefing, no. 95 (Jakarta/Brussels, ICG, 27 August 2009), pp. 1–2, 6, 9, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B095-indonesia-noordin-tops-support-base.aspx> (last accessed: 28 June 2010).

¹⁵ Sidney Jones, “Terrorism: What we have learned from Aceh”, *Tempo*, March 11, 2010, see in the website of ICG, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/sidney-terrorism-what-we-have-learned-from-aceh.aspx#> (last accessed: June 27, 2010). About a change and shift in the strategic and operational thought ascribed to the new network, including a change in prioritizing of targets, see also Farouk Arnaz, Heru Andriyanto & Candra Malik, “Police Say SBY Was Target of Independence Day Bloodbath”, *JakartaGlobe*, 15 May 2010, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/police-say-sby-was-target-of-independence-day-bloodbath/375083> (last accessed 25 June 2010); Camelia Pasandaran, “President Hits Out at Terrorists, Says Indonesia Will Never Be Islamic State”, *JakartaGlobe*, 17 May 2010, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/president-hits-out-at-terrorists-says-indonesia-will-never-be-islamic-state/375377> (last accessed: July 21, 2010); “Indonesian police foil ‘assassination plot’”, CNN, 14 May 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/05/14/indonesia.assassination.attempt/index.html> (last accessed 25 June 2010).

mainly the U.S. and its Western allies. Repercussions of this debate can be observed in the shift in strategic and operational thought ascribed to the Aceh-based militant network, though these two specific terms have not been discussed, as far as known, in the varied reports and publications about this group.

Usually an attempt to follow the roots and traces of fundamental concepts, ideas, terminology, and rhetoric—which have shaped the contemporary *jihadi* discourse—leads to Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), the Egyptian radical thinker of the Muslim Brothers, who has strongly influenced radical Muslims worldwide, due much to his final book and most popular one, *Ma‘alim fi al-tariq* (“Signposts on the Road”), published in 1964. This book, which was translated into many languages including Indonesian, provided the grounds for the laying of charges brought by the Egyptian court against members of the Muslim Brothers, including Sayyid Qutb himself, for plotting against the Gamal Abdel Nasser regime. Qutb and some other leaders of the Muslim Brothers were executed in 1966.

The belief in God authority on earth (*hakimiyya*) has a central position in Qutb’s doctrine. At the same time, Qutb identified the contemporary reality as standing in stark contrast to this belief. Making a reactualization of the term *jahiliyya*, originally referred to the ignorance and godlessness that prevailed in pre-Islamic Arabia, he perceived the contemporary societies as an embodiment of a new *jahiliyya* that have rejected the divinity of God and God’s sovereignty, and hence have legitimized themselves through purely man-made criteria. The Nasserist regime of his time was also identified by him as a clear manifestation of the new *jahiliyya*. For him, *jihad* is as eternal struggle for replacing “*jahili*” regimes in the Muslim world and for establishing a true Islamic polity over the entire world, while removing those who stand as an obstacle in the way of implementing God’s divine authority on earth.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Sayyid Qutb, *Ma‘alim fi al-Tariq* [Ramallah ?], 2004; Gilles Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islam*, trans. Jon Rothschild (London: SAQI, 2005), pp. 34–69; Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 31–31; Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, pp. 4–9; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, enlarged edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 21–35; John O. Voll, “Fundamentalism in the Sunni Arab World: Egypt and the Sudan”. In *Fundamentalism Observed*, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 371–372; Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, pp. 90–93.

Less than two decades later, the Egyptian Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj (1952–1982) brought to the radical militant discourse a more specific definition related to prioritizing of the targets in the *jihadi* struggle. Faraj, who was strongly influenced by Sayyid Qutb and terminated his life in a similar way to him, was the radical ideologue and theorist of *Tanzim al-jihad* (Jihad Organization), the extreme militant group that assassinated President Sadat on 6 October 1981. He was executed for his role in this assassination. His extreme radical doctrine and manifesto are very strongly connected with his formative pamphlet, *al-Farida al-Ghaiba* (“The Neglected Duty”); it has become an inspiring text for many Muslim militants during the 1980s and the 1990s. Faraj was deeply guided by a belief in the importance of establishing an Islamic state ruled by God’s law. He saw *jihad* as the way to do it. The *jihad* was perceived by him as a highly significant Islamic duty that has been neglected by Muslims. Hence he stated unequivocally that *jihad*, as an armed struggle against the “near enemy” (*al-‘adu al-qarib*), the “infidel” regimes in the Muslim countries, for removing them and establishing Islamic state, ruled by God’s law, has to come first; before the *jihad* against the “far enemy” (*al-‘adu al-ba‘id*), the “imperialism”. Faraj, who was the first militant ideologue to coin this distinction between the “near enemy” and the “far enemy”, made it clear that *jihad* against the enemy abroad, the imperialism, has to be carried out under Muslim command of the Islamic state. Therefore waging a *jihad* against the enemy abroad, before establishing the Islamic state at home, might even consolidate the position of “infidel” regime, by the victory. He also stated that since the “infidel” regimes at home actually occupied Muslim countries, they have to be considered as an enemy within the territory of Islam. Hence he argued that the *jihad* against them is a defensive in its nature and as such it has to be perceived doctrinally as *fard ‘ayn*, namely, a compulsory duty that should be performed by every Muslim for defending Muslim lands. This is to be distinguished from the second type of military *jihad* that is formulated in the Islamic legal sources as *fard kifaya*, namely, collective duty. This latter type of *jihad* refers to a war initiated by the Muslims for expansion of the territory of Islam (*dar al-Islam*). Such type of *jihad* can only be implemented by an Islamic ruler, the caliph; if the Muslim ruler appointed specific Muslims to perform this duty, the rest members of the Muslim community are excused from it.¹⁷

¹⁷ See Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj, *Farida al- Ghaiba*. [Ramallah ?] [1993 ?]; Gerges, *The Far*

Qutb has given militant Muslims worldwide an inspiring doctrinal platform, or manifesto, of *jihad* with a revolutionary connotation; resistance of and struggle against local regimes in Muslim countries that are perceived by them among other things as “infidel”, “impious”, “evil”, “corrupted”, “Westernized”, “immoral”, “tyrant” and “despotic”. Such a struggle has been integrated into a leading aim of establishing God’s rule on earth by Islamization of both state and society. Faraj has prioritized for militant *jihadis* worldwide their targets in the armed struggle while confronting varied “enemies. Hence, he signified regimes at home as the “near enemy”, to be distinguished from the “far enemy”, and stated that the struggle against the former should come first. Inspired to a large extent by both Qutb and Faraj, Sunni-oriented *jihadis*, in the Arab world in particular, focused their armed struggle, since the 1970s until the late 1990s, on the “near enemy”, mainly.¹⁸

Substantial signs of a shift in this doctrinal and strategic approach, both in theory and practice, were observed since the late 1990s. A global *jihadi* struggle against the “far enemy”, the U.S. and its allies in particular, rather than local jihadi struggles against the “near enemy”, has started increasingly to get priority. This shift is strongly interwoven with a moving of the *jihadism* from a locality to a kind of globalization, or internationalization. It is also strongly connected with the name of al-Qaeda; in particular with Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, considered to be al-Qaeda's second in command. Naturally, this doctrinal, strategic shift has further popularized the distinction between the “near enemy” and the “far enemy”.¹⁹ At the same time, it

Enemy, pp. 9–12, 22–45; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 12, 34–69; Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 86–87; Sivan, *Radical Islam*, pp. 127–129; Shmuel Bar, *Warrant for Terror: fatwas of Radical Islam and the Duty of jihad* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 30–31, 36–37; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 15–17.

¹⁸ See Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p. 1, 9–12, 43–79.

¹⁹ See Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, pp. 12–15, 80–150; John Arquilla and Douglas A. Borer (Eds.), *Information Strategy and Warfare: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 91–92; Joas Wagemakers, “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi: The Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, Issue 2 (August 2009), pp. 293–294; Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 299–322; Khalil Gebara, “The End of Egyptian Islamic Jihad?”, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 3, Issue 3 (9 February 2005), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=27523 (last accessed 28 June 2010).

has to be said that the current *jihadism* in the Sunni world is not a monolithic movement and there are also debates, conflicts and tensions among *jihadis* over the question which “enemy” has to be attacked first.

Though the terms *al-‘adu al-qarib* (“the near enemy”) and *al-‘adu al-ba‘id* (“the far enemy”) have not surfaced, as far as known, in the media reports and publications on the Aceh-based militant network, and perhaps were not even largely mentioned by name within this network, the global debate among militant Muslims on this issue seems to actually resonate into the shift in the strategic and operational thought ascribed to this network. Furthermore, a view into perceptions laid by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the radical ideologue, who is considered to be a direct source of inspiration for this network, suggests some possibility that his views on the issue of the “near” and “far” enemy even infiltrated into the strategic and operational approach of the discussed network. Also some other insights that further cast a light on the approach of the discussed network in general and on the issue of prioritizing of targets, in particular, are revealed through a glimpse into al-Maqdisi’s view.

Steven Brooke argues that the struggle against the “near enemies” of Islam is perceived by al-Maqdisi as more important than the struggle against “far enemies” of Islam, such as Israel and the U.S., since the threat posed by the “near enemy” is greater and far more serious.²⁰ In a somewhat different way, Joas Wagemakers assesses that al-Maqdisi’s position in the debate on the question of which enemy to fight first is located somewhere in the middle; al-Maqdisi refuses to condemn attacks against the “far enemy” , but he prefers *jihad* to be directed at the regimes in the Muslim world, headed by rulers perceived by him as apostates (*murtaddun*).²¹

The Aceh-based militant network is said to give more attention and priority, as a target, to the government and civilian officials and personnel of the security forces. Nevertheless, it is hard to conclude, from what have been published so far, that the network got a definite decision that the struggle against the “near enemy”, rather than

²⁰ Steven Brooke “The Preacher and the Jihadi” , *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 3 (2006), pp. 56–57, <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-preacher-and-the-jihadi> (last accessed 29 June 2010).

²¹ Wagemakers, “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi”, p. 294.

against the “far enemy”, has to come first, let alone that “representatives” of the both categories are mentioned in its militant agenda. As was already mentioned, Sidney Jones argues that those who joined the new network represent a more militant stream of the extremist movement in Indonesia that identifies strongly with al-Qaeda and seeks to build on the legacy of Noordin. It is likely that for such militants, it was hard to abandon the struggle against the “far enemy” though they are said to give greater importance to attack those who serve the regime at home. At the same time, one cannot exclude the possibility that the approach adopted by the discussed network in this issue also reflects, to some extent, a middle position that is ascribed to al-Maqdisi in the debate on the “near” and “far” enemy.

Similar to Sayyid Qutb and Abd al-Salam Faraj, al-Maqdisi also aims sharp criticism at rulers in Muslim countries who do not apply the *shari‘a*, the Islamic law. He accuses them of *kufir* (infidelity) and largely describes them as *tawaghit*,²² “false idols”, since they are turning themselves and their laws into objects of worship.²³ It is likely that this perception inspired the Aceh-based network to signify as an “enemy” who serves the Indonesian regime, with its foundation not based on the *shari‘a*, but on the Pancasila, a secular, or religiously neutral state philosophy.

A view into al-Maqdisi’s perceptions suggests that perhaps it is not only the formative foundations of the Indonesian polity that make the current Indonesian regime as an “enemy”, but also the democracy that is successfully built in this country, a home of the largest Muslim community in the world. Extreme radical Muslims worldwide strongly reject democracy as an un-Islamic concept that is anchored in political tradition of the West. Believing in the ultimate God's rule on earth and that the state has to be ruled by the *shari‘a* only, they deny the basic democratic concept of people's sovereignty and the non-religious perception of man-made laws. Al-Maqdisi, who shares this position, sharply rejects democracy. His doctrinal denial of democracy is strongly manifested in his book, *al-Dimuqratiya Din* (“Democracy: A Religion”). He argues that Democracy is a religion, but not the religion of God. He perceives democracy, which gives sovereignty to the people, as a

²² See above note 9 .

²³ See Wagemakers, “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi”, pp. 289–291.

threat to the basic Islamic idea of the *tawhid*, the believing in the unity of God. Therefore, he states that it is required to keep away from parliaments that constitute “castles of polytheism and strongholds of paganism”, to make effort to destroy democracy, to treat as enemies its followers, to hate them and to wage *jihad* against them.²⁴ He also sharply rejected as un-Islamic preliminary signs of democracy in the Arab world, such as the Kuwaiti elections in the early 1990s and the Jordanian elections in 1993 and 1997.²⁵

But al-Maqdisi, who condemns contemporary rulers and regimes in Muslim countries, their man-made laws, their policies and democracy, accuses them of infidelity (*kufir*) and declares them to be infidels (*kafirun*, *kuffar*), avoided applying general *takfir* (excommunication of an individual from the *umma* of unbelief or apostasy) to contemporary societies in Muslim countries, as a whole, unlike some militant ideologues and groups. Thus he applied *takfir* only to *al-tawaghit wa ansaruhum* (“the idols and their helpers”). It means, according to Joas Wagemakers, that he considers as infidels only rulers and people who are directly engaged in abetting and helping the regime and its legislative process; for example, the police, the army, ministers and members of parliament.²⁶ Guided by the same reasoning, he disagreed with declaring of general *takfir* by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi on everyone in Iraq who is actively working for democracy or participating there in democratic activities as *kuffar* (“infidels”); a declaration that makes them all as legitimate targets for *jihad*. Hence, although he supported *jihad* against the “forces of democracy” and those Muslims who aid them, he expressed an opposition to declaring as *kuffar* the generality of people who participate in the elections.²⁷ His selective attitude may explain the agenda of the new Aceh-based terrorist network, which included attacks within the base area on *taghut*; civilian officials and security forces who were

²⁴ Abu Muhammad ‘Isam al-Maqdisi, (Bait al-Muqaddas, 1997), p. 3. See also Brooke, “The Preacher and the Jihadi”, pp. 52, 54–55, 58–59; Wagemakers, “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi”, pp. 291–292.

²⁵ See Brooke “The Preacher and the Jihadi”, p. 54.

²⁶ Wagemakers, “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi”, p. 292. See also Brooke, “The Preacher and the Jihadi”, pp. 57–59.

²⁷ See Brooke, “The Preacher and the Jihadi”, pp. 54, 58–59. Al-Maqdisi selective attitude can also be observed in his position on the use of suicide-bombing – see *Ibid.*, p. 61; Wagemakers, “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi”, p. 295.

considered to be obstacles to the application of Islamic law, including Western civilians, who were spreading secular thought.

Insights suggested by historical view into the local context: The case of Darul Islam's Rebellions

One of the reports by the ICG on Indonesia opens by stating that “No understanding of jihadism in Indonesia is possible without understanding the Darul Islam movement (DI) and its efforts to establish the Islamic State of Indonesia (Negara Islam Indonesia (NII))”²⁸. Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy portray the DI as a hybrid of local and international, or global, mainly Middle Eastern, *jihadi* influences and qualities; and with regard to local *jihadi* influences, they focus on the DI rebellions.²⁹ The case of the Aceh-based militant network seems to supply another piece of evidence that the particularities of the Indonesian context also offer interesting insights for understanding current radical, militant phenomena in the Indonesian archipelago.

The armed struggle of the DI movement was actually a combination of several regional rebellions—in West Java, Central Java, South Sulawesi, South Kalimantan (Borneo) and Aceh—against the Indonesian central government in 1948–1962. These rebellions have left a deep imprint on the modern history of Indonesia as a fervent militant struggle for establishing Indonesia as an Islamic state that seriously challenged the just born country, founded on a secular or religiously neutral state philosophy, the Pancasila. These rebellions were entirely suppressed by the Indonesian Army in the first half of the 1960s, and not before Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwirjo (1905–1962), the charismatic leader of the DI, was captured and executed.³⁰

²⁸ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Recycling Militants in Indonesia: Darul Islam and the Australian Embassy Bombing*, Asia Report no.92 (Jakarta/Brussels: ICG, 22 February 2005), p. I, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/092-recycling-militants-in-indonesia-darul-islam-and-the-australian-embassy-bombing.aspx> (last accessed 1 July 2010).

²⁹ See Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy, *Joining the Caravan?: The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia* (Alexandria, New South Wales: Lowey Institute for International Policy, 2005), pp. 78–89, <http://www.loweyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=229> (last accessed 5 July 2010).

³⁰ On Darul Islam, see C. van Dijk, *Rebellion under the Banner of Islam: The Darul Islam Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981); Karl D. Jackson, *Traditional Authority, Islam, and Rebellion : A Study of Indonesian Political Behaviour* (Berkeley : University of California Press, c1980); Soebardi, “Kartosuwiryo and the Darul Islam Rebellion in Indonesia”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. XIV, no. 1 (March 1983), pp. 109–33; B. J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia* (The

The DI is considered now to be very loose but enduring a web of personal contacts that extends to most of the major islands in Indonesia. Its past rebellions, including the image of Kartosuwirjo, strongly inspire extreme Islamic radical groups in Indonesia nowadays; some of them are even regarded to be splinters and offshoots of the DI. A particular strong historical and contemporary links, of conceptual, organizational and personal nature, are extended from the DI movement and its rebellions to the JI, though there are also some significant differences in religious doctrine and outlook between the two. DI communities are considered, for example, to still constitute a major source of JI recruiting and there is considerable intermarriage between families of the networks of the JI and the DI movement that strengthens the ties between the two networks. The links between the two networks are going too often through Pesantren al-Mukmin, located in Solo, Central Java. This *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) is also known as Pondok Ngruki and “Ngruki Network”. Pesantren al-Mukmin, including its alumni, which has played a significant role in the narrative of the JI, is strongly anchored in the heritage and experience of the DI movement and its rebellions; leading figures from its personal came from the ranks of the movement. Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, for example, the co-founder of this *pesantren*, joined the DI in the second half of the 1970s and held senior positions in this movement during the 1980s and the early 1990s. Therefore, it not surprising that most members of “Ngruki Network” are said to be committed to carrying on the struggle of DI rebellions for establishing an Islamic state based on Islamic law.³¹

Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), pp. 54–75; M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia: Since c. 1200*, 3rd edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 261–286.

³¹ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia Background: How The Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates*, ICG Asia Report, No. 43 (Jakarta/Brussels, ICG, 11 December 2002), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/043-indonesia-background-how-the-jemaah-islamiyah-terrorist-network-operates.aspx> (last accessed: July 1, 2010); International Crisis Group (ICG), *Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia: The Case of the “Ngruki Network” in Indonesia*, ICG Indonesia Briefing (Jakarta/Brussels: ICG, 8 August 2002), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B020-al-qaeda-in-southeast-asia-the-case-of-the-ngruki-network-in-indonesia-corrected-on-10-January-2003.aspx> (last accessed 1 July 2010); ICG, *Recycling Militants in Indonesia*; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Jemaah Islamiyah in South East Asia: Damaged but Still Dangerous*, ICG Asia Report, No. 63, (Jakarta/Brussels, 26 August 2003), p. 2, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/063-jemaah-islamiyah-in-south-east-asia-damaged-but-still-dangerous.aspx> (last accessed 1 July 2010); Bubalo and Fealy, *Joining the Caravan*, pp. 85–88; Greg Barton, *Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah And the Soul of Islam* (University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 13–16, 46–48, 51, 55–59, 77, 86; Martin van

Those who were formerly in the JI and the network of the DI constitute a significant component of the new Aceh-based militant network.³² Dulmatin, the leader the discussed network, was alleged to be a leading member of the JI.³³ Such linkages further urge to reveal threads that lead from DI rebellions to the strategic and operational thought of this network. Since the *jihadism* of the DI was not based on contemporary Middle Eastern sources, but rather on interpretations of centuries old classical jurisprudence (*fiqh*) texts,³⁴ an attempt to identify such threads is tantamount to a search also for local historical and conceptual influences on the strategic and operational thought of the discussed network.

In 1948, while taking part in the National Revolution—the Indonesian war of independence against the Dutch, who refused to give up their long years of rule in the Indonesian archipelago—the militant Islamic guerrillas in West Java, led by Kartosuwirjo, broke with the Republican government; they accused the central national government for having a lenient approach in the war against the Dutch and strongly rejected its non-Islamic political ideology. At the same time, Kartosuwirjo and his followers, who were strongly committed to the idea of an Islamic state based on the *shari‘a*, the Islamic law, started gradually to form a provisional government in the territory held by them. But it was not before August 1949 that Kartosuwirjo finally proclaimed the establishment of the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII, “The Islamic State of Indonesia”) on the territory held by his forces. As the head of the NII, he was given the title of *Imam*. The *Imam* was to preside over a Cabinet (Dewan Imamah). According to the constitution, there were to be three other bodies: Majelis Syuro (Arabic: *Majlis Shura*), the “Parliament”; Dewan Syuro, the “Executive” of

Bruinessen, “Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in post-Suharto Indonesia”, *South East Asia Research*, vol. 10, no. 2 (July 2002), pp. 128–130, 146.

³² ICG, *Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*, p. 3.

³³ See for example Arnaz, Andriyanto & Malik, “Police Say SBY Was Target of Independence Day Bloodbath”; “Profile: Dulmatin, JI’s ‘genius’”, *BBC*, March 9, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4318666.stm> (last accessed 2 July 2010); “Bali bomber’ Dulmatin confirmed dead in Indonesia raid”, *BBC*, 10 March 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8559054.stm> (last accessed: March 10, 2010).

³⁴ See Bubalo and Fealy, *Joining the Caravan?*, pp. 86–87.

Majlis Syuro; and Dewan Fatwa, chaired by grand *Mufti*, to advise the *Imam* and his government.³⁵

Indeed, as can be learnt from ICG's report, "Indonesia: *Jihadi* Surprise in Aceh", the roots of the idea of the discussed militant network to establish *qoidah aminah* (secure base) in Aceh can be found in al-Maqdisi's concept of *qital tamkin*; the fighting to consolidate power that aims mainly to establish Islamic law and even to advance a vision of establishing an Islamic state. But perhaps the members of the new network were also inspired in their plan of making Aceh a secure base, at least indirectly or even unconsciously, by the earlier authentic model set by the DI movement on the Indonesian soil, of establishing an Islamic state on a limited territory, hoping to make it a preliminary basis for a much broader Islamic state in the future. The fact that Aceh was one of the major theatres for DI rebellions can also sustain such a possibility.

Some historical threads might even lead to the discussed issue of prioritizing of targets. From the end of 1948 onwards, the Islamic militias in West Java, commonly known as the DI, which were led by Kartosuwirjo, even made the Indonesian Republic their primary target in the war that ended in December 1949. They explained their move by claiming that the secular Republican leaders of Indonesia had made themselves as evil as the Dutch by rejecting Islam as the sole foundation of Indonesia. They also accused the Indonesian Republic in showing hesitancy in the struggle for complete independence. Since then, it was mostly the Republican rather than the Dutch troops who were attacked by the Islamic militias in Java.³⁶ Consequently, the war of independence against the Dutch started to resemble a kind of triangular war, with Kartosuwiryo's forces battling both Sukarno's nationalists and the Dutch. Hence, more than 30 years before the publication of *al-Farida al-Ghaiba* by 'Abd as-Salaam Faraj, the DI movement actually made a distinction, without using the precise terms that had not been coined yet, between the "near enemy" and the "far enemy", and even gave some priority to the fighting against the former—the local regime—over the fighting against the latter—the Dutch. Notwithstanding, the DI did

³⁵ See van Dijk, *Rebellion under the Banner of Islam*, pp. 1–126.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

not cease fighting against the Dutch. Is it probable that the logic of the strategy adopted by the Aceh-based network in the issue of definition of the enemy, or prioritizing of targets, somewhat resembles such an approach?

Conclusion

In 2004, the author of this article examined in his book, *Islam in Indonesia: Modernism, Radicalism and the Middle East Dimension*,³⁷ the contemporary radical Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia through both global, mainly Middle Eastern, and local perspectives. The case of DI rebellions, as a manifestation of a war cry of *jihad*, which was anchored in the local Indonesian context, was also discussed. Its inspiring effect on the narrative of Islamic militancy during the recent decades was also noted.³⁸ He concluded his discussion on the global and local contexts of radical Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia by saying:

Indeed, the current radical fundamentalism in Indonesia has a responsive nature, being largely influenced by the ideology of radical fundamentalist groups and movements in the Middle East. But also some Islamic concepts, which underwent a process of reactualization in the contemporary Islam in Indonesia, seem to be diffused into current radical fundamentalism in Indonesia. So, through a broader historical perspective, pertaining to both the Islamic conceptual interaction between Indonesia and the Middle East and to the Indonesian local context itself, some insights, which enrich the view of the complex phenomenon of radical Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia, are beginning to emerge. Observations limited to the current scene are likely to overlook some of these insights.³⁹

The discussed case of the Aceh-based militant network suggests evidence that the multi-faceted contours of Islamic radicalism and militancy in Indonesia tend to be revealed through a view that catches the Indonesian local context and the global context, the Middle Eastern in particular. In other words, though being spread far

³⁷ Giora Eliraz, *Islam in Indonesia: Modernism, Radicalism and the Middle East Dimension* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

³⁸ See *Ibid.*, pp. 56–61.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.

away from each other, a connective fabric of links, in Islamic context mainly, which exists hundreds of years, brings them closer. Therefore, an attempt to observe militant Islamic phenomena in Indonesia is likely to take the observer into a journey to two regions—the Indonesian archipelago and the Middle East—a journey that requires a careful navigation between the universalities of the global aspects and the particularities of the local Indonesian context.

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