



## **Lee Kuan Yew: To Stop Terrorism, Go After the Queen Bees (Preachers)**

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### **Abstract**

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Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew recognized Wahhabi Salafism as the root cause of ISIS back in 2003. He argued Asian Muslims were traditionally moderate and tolerant, but they have been radicalized in the 40-odd years since the oil crisis and petrodollars became a windfall for Saudi extremists to proselytize in mosques and madrassas. He noted terrorists are only the worker bees, and the queen bees are the preachers that radicalize young minds. As such he said moderate Muslims must enter the mosques and madrassas to counter these extremists' teachings.

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## Analysis

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Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew recognized the root cause of ISIS back in 2003.

When Fareed Zakaria of *Newsweek* interviewed him regarding al Qaeda and Islamic extremism in Iraq, he warned, "In killing terrorists, you will only kill the worker bees. The queen bees are the preachers, who teach a deviant form of Islam in schools and Islamic centers, who capture and twist the minds of the young."

He further warned, "Americans, however, make the mistake of seeking a largely military solution. You must use force. But force will only deal with the tip of the problem."

A decade later, General Jonathan Shaw, Britain's former assistant Chief of the Defence Staff echoes the same warning as we face ISIS in Iraq redux.

He told *The Telegraph* that Qatar and Saudi Arabia had ignited a "time bomb" by spending billions of dollars promoting and proselytizing the militant Wahhabi Salafism, and this must stop. "The root problem is that those two countries are the only two countries in the world where Wahhabi Salafism is the state religion—and Isis is a violent expression of Wahhabist Salafism."

Indeed Lee Kuan Yew also points the finger at Saudi Arabia for the cause of terrorism in Asia.

### Saudi-funded madrassas radicalized Asian Muslims

According to Lee, Muslims in Southeast Asia were traditionally moderate and tolerant. But in the 40-odd years since the oil crisis and petrodollars became a windfall in the Muslim world, Saudi extremists have been proselytizing, building mosques and madrassas that preach Wahhabism.

As a result, this extreme version that Lee characterized as a "venomous religion" have radicalized Southeast Asian Muslims, and pitched to Muslims throughout the world that the gold standard for being a good Muslim is Saudi Arabia.

Southeast Asia thus has fallen victim to the Wahhabi-driven al Qaeda affiliate Jemaah Islamiah (JI) that was responsible for the 2002 Bali bombing and a string of terrorist attacks in Indonesia from 2003 to 2005. Now, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Philippines are witnessing a revival of Islamic extremism via the spread of ISIS.

There are renewed activities with JI as well as other splinter groups Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid and Abu Sayyaf, and the spiritual leader of JI bombers, radical cleric Abu Bakr Bashir, has pledged allegiance to ISIS.

In fact militants from Indonesia and Malaysia fighting in Syria have formed a military unit for Malay-speaking ISIS fighters called Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyyah, or Malay Archipelago Unit for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (Ipac) disclosed this unit was formed in the town of Al-Shadadi in Syria's Hasaka province last month.

The embedded Wahhabi ideology among Southeast Asian Muslims continues to express itself via violent jihad.

Sri Yunanto, an expert on militancy at Indonesia's anti-terrorism agency, said many jihadi groups within Indonesia are using the Syrian war to create a pool of combat-trained and indoctrinated recruits. At least four Indo-



nesians have been killed in Syria and Iraq, and one of them was a suicide bomber Wildan Mukhollad, who blew himself up in a restaurant in Baghdad earlier this year.

His teacher at an Islamic boarding school expressed pride at his jihad. "He was a good boy, a smart boy...I knew that it was his dream, he had reached what he dreamed of as a kid: to be martyred and go to heaven."

This is the type of perverse indoctrination Lee despises at the Wahhabi schools.

### Asian Muslims could wage ideological battle against Wahhabism

ISIS is already gaining popularity and openly recruiting in Indonesia with over 200 million Muslim population. Chep Hernawan, a fund-raiser and self-proclaimed leader of the Indonesian chapter of ISIS, further supported this virulent ideology and told the *Associated Press*, "I'm convinced that these are religious acts based on Islamic teachings (permitting acts) that strike fear in the hearts of enemies of Islam."

As such Lee exhorted moderate Muslims must have the courage to go into the mosques and madrassas to switch off the radicals and stem the spread of this virus of the mind. He added unless militant groups in Arab states and Islamic theocracies are seen to fail, Jemaah Islamiyah and other militant groups in the non-Arab Muslim world will continue to recruit extremists.

General Shaw likewise argued that in the short term the U.S.-led coalition could achieve tactical success via military force against ISIS, but in the long-term this will be an ideological battle to counter extremist theology.

The air campaign would not "stop the support of people in Qatar and Saudi Arabia for this kind of activity...it's not addressing the fundamental problem of Wahhabi Salafism as a culture and creed, which has gotten out of control and is still the ideological basis of Isis."

Lee concurs. In a prescient 2002 speech for Singapore's National Day, he argues the big divide is no longer between communist and democratic countries, or between the West and the East.

"Now it is between Muslim terrorists versus the U.S., Israel, and their supporters. A secondary battle is between militant Islam and non-militant modernist Islam." He doesn't believe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or U.S. action in Afghanistan and Iraq are the cause of Islamic terrorism, and that terrorism would continue even if the Middle East problem were solved.

Lee continued that in Southeast Asia "Malaysia and Indonesia have to face the challenge of militant Islamists, those who go for militant jihad and want to implement Shariah law so that Muslims will be strict in dress code, in food, in prayer, in punishment for crimes. Fortunately the majority of Muslims seek their way forward through trade, investments, knowledge, management, science and technology."

Thus, Asian Muslims could stand up and delegitimize the Wahhabi brand of Islam, and go after the queen bees to stop terrorism in Asia.

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**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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### About the Author of this Issue

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