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**ISLAM AND SOCIETY IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA
AFTER SEPTEMBER 11**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the struggle for the soul of Islam within the global Muslim community in the context of two major Muslim majority nations in Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia. An ongoing, unsettled debate between 'Liberal Islam' and 'Literal Islam' continues unabated. In its midst, evidence of terrorist networks in the region have surfaced. Some extreme proponents of Literal Islam harbour irredentist visions and are committed to establishing an Islamic state unifying the territories of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, southern Philippines and Singapore. Such visions are not compatible with ASEAN cooperative arrangements to encourage increased and intra-regional communications, tourism and trade. This incompatibility raises questions about ASEAN's cohesion and highlights the inescapable reality in Southeast Asia that the state remains fragile and open to challenge in an era of political instability, economic stagnation and social disruption.

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ISLAM AND SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the ensuing war in Afghanistan and the recent revelations of the existence of al-Qaeda networks in Southeast Asia have drawn attention to the challenge posed by radical Islamic ideologies to global and regional security. It appears to validate Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis that there is an inevitable conflict between Islam and the West.[1]

This is a mistaken view. The uncritical acceptance of such a perspective risks the adoption of self-fulfilling US policies which undermine US relationships with states having Muslim majorities, increases the likelihood of a crescent of instability from the Middle East to Southeast Asia and fosters hostility towards the United States and the West by Muslims around the globe.

Since September 11, Christian fundamentalists in the United States have demonstrated a lack of understanding of Islam. The leading television evangelist Pat Robertson broadcast that Islam "is not a peaceful religion that wants to co-exist…I have taken issue with our esteemed president in regard to his stand in saying that Islam is a peaceful religion. It's just not."[2] Franklin Graham, the son of Billy Graham, claimed: "The God of Islam is not the same God…It's a very different God, and I believe it is a very evil and wicked religion."[3] The danger is that this simplistic view of Islam will permeate the popular imagination, forming the basis of policy decisions by key government officials in the United States and the West. One example to be avoided is a comment by the Chairman of the US House of Representatives Sub-Committee on Terrorism and Homeland Security, Rep. C. Saxby Chambliss (R-Georgia). He told Georgia state law enforcement officials that they should "just turn (the sheriff) loose and have him arrest every Muslim that crosses the state line."[4]

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[1] Samuel Huntington, "The clash of civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72 (3), Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.

[2] Alan Cooperman, *Washington Post*, 22 February 2002.

[3] Franklin Graham, *The New York Times*, 20 November 2001.

[4] Thomas B. Edsall, *Washington Post*, 21 November 2001.

The reality is that there is a struggle for the soul of Islam within the global Muslim community today. To provide an insight into this struggle within the global Muslim community, this analysis discusses the role of Islam in Southeast Asia, focusing on the two major Muslim majority states in the region, Malaysia and Indonesia. With a population of 228 million, of whom 88% identify themselves as Muslims, Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population but remains a secular state. 59% of Malaysia's population of 23 million is Muslim. Malaysia's success in maintaining a pluralistic political system, a vibrant economy which has grown at 8% per annum over the past two decades and the adoption of policies which have fostered social integration has made Malaysia a successful developmental model for many Islamic and emerging countries. The small Islamic monarchy of Brunei and the significant Muslim minority populations in Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore are influenced by trends and developments affecting Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Historically, when Islam came to Southeast Asia in the third wave of its expansion, brought by Sufi missionaries from West and Central Asia, it adapted to the multi-cultural milieu of societies that had long been influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism.

A division developed in the 19th century between the Sufi-influenced practices of the *Kaum Tua* and the Wahhabi-influenced approach of the *Kaum Muda* in Indonesia and later in Malaysia. The *Kaum Tua* represented the traditional court-centred doctrines in Malaysia and the inclusionist beliefs of the Javanese heartland, which had accommodated pre-Islamic and Sufi practices and beliefs. The *Kaum Muda* represented the modernist, Muslim reformists strongly influenced by the pan-Islamic revivalist movement originating from Egypt. It sought to expunge the pre-Islamic beliefs that had been woven into the fabric and practice of Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia. As a result of the large numbers of pilgrims who went on the haj to Mecca and Muslim clerics who had attended *madrassahs* (Islamic religious schools) in Arabia and India, the austere literal interpretations of the Islamic faith contained in Wahhabi doctrines have had a growing impact on the region since the 1870's.[5]

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[5] William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967) especially Chapters 3, 4 and 6. In reality, some Modernist ideas were influential in Sufi circles while many Modernists continued to be influenced by traditional Sufi practices. For a discussion of the Islamic roots of Malayo-Indonesian mysticism, see Robert W. Hefner, "Introduction" in Robert W. Hefner and Patricia Horvatich

In Indonesia, this division between traditionalists and Wahhabi-influenced modernists was reflected earlier in the sharp differences between Nahdlatul Ulama (the Association of Religious Scholars) and Muhammadiyah. NU was perceived as traditionalist, conservative and rural Javanese-based while Muhammadiyah was regarded as modernist, innovative and urban-based with strong support in the urban centres of Java and in the outer islands of Indonesia. Today, NU retains influence within the Indonesian government and society through its accomodationist stance, inclusive approach and the emergence of a younger generation of innovative Islamic thinkers within its intellectual leadership. Muhammadiyah has become domesticated, with a turning to Sufism while maintaining a commitment to reform within the framework of an essentially secular, multi-religious Indonesian society.[6] Most devout Muslims (*santri*) in Indonesia today are affiliated with either NU or Muhammadiyah, a significant fact as both organizations are moderate in character.[7]

Saudi Arabia's petrodollar boom of the 1970's following the quadrupling of oil prices led to Saudi Arabia becoming a major influence in the promotion of Wahhabi doctrines in the region. Financial support and grants were given by the Saudi government and private organizations such as the Jeddah-based World Muslim League to those groups who advocated more fundamentalist approaches to Islamic doctrines and were most active in seeking the creation of Islamic states. Such groups were in the forefront of efforts to emphasise the Muslim character of believers by encouraging the use of distinctive Muslim dress, education in *madrassahs* and an emphasis on literal interpretation of the Koran and the *hadiths*, the sayings and invocations of the Prophet Mohammad.

Over the past two decades, Malaysian Government policies have aimed at winning Malay Muslim political support in the face of sustained competition from the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) which advocated an Islamic state. This competition led to

(eds.), *Islam in an Era of Nation-States: Politics and Religious Revival in Muslim Southeast Asia* (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1997), pp. 3-40.

[6] The Islamic revival in Indonesia has tended to be discussed in scripturalist terms. However, Julia Day Howell has demonstrated Sufism's attraction to modernising sectors of Indonesian society, especially the urban middle and upper classes, even as a vigorous revival of Islamic practices occurs in these sectors. Cf. Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (August 2001), pp. 701-729.

[7] Greg Barton, "The Prospects for Islam", in Grayson Lloyd and Shannon Smith, *Indonesia Today: Challenges of History* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2001), pp. 244-255.

efforts to out-Islamise PAS with the creation of a Muslim religious bureaucracy and the codification of laws that provided the basis of an Islamic state.[8] In Indonesia, for most of President Soeharto's tenure, political Islam was seen as the opposition to the state. The Indonesian Government strongly supported the religious needs of the Muslim community. However, efforts to transform Indonesia into an Islamic state were opposed vigorously by President Soeharto and the Indonesian armed forces. Key developments that should be recalled include the bloody crackdown on rioters in Tanjong Priok in 1984, the trials of leading proponents of a Muslim state (*Dar-ul Islam*) and the government's emphasis on the state ideology of Pancasila which provided for belief in one God without defining what that God should be. With the emasculation of political parties and the establishment of an authoritarian political system, increased religious identification was often synonymous with distancing from the existing political system in Indonesia.

The past two decades have seen an increasing *santri-ization* of Indonesian society. (The *santri* community is seen as devout Muslims compared to the *abangan* nominal Muslims. In reality, the divisions are not so stark and there is a continuum that reflects the diverse practice of religious faith.[9]) Increased public practice of their Islamic faith has also characterised Malaysian and Singapore Muslims. The focus has been on the form rather than the substance of religious belief, including social pressure to attend Friday prayers at the mosque, for women to wear the *tudung* (Muslim head dress) and for Muslims to eat separately from non-Muslims.

At the same time, there has been greater awareness of Islam's global identity, with growing support for the Palestinian cause, and commitment to support the struggles of Muslims in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya. While the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia backed the governments of the Philippines and Thailand in the face of Islamic separatist movements in the southern Philippines and southern Thailand, popular support for the insurgents exists at the ground

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[8] Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Islam, Civil Society and Ethnic Relations in Malaysia" in Nakamura Mituso, Sharon Siddique and Omar Farouk Bajunid, *Islam and Civil Society in Southeast Asia* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore 2001), pp. 57-75.

[9] For a discussion of the santri/abangan (kejawen) variations in religious practices, refer to Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese Culture* (Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1985).

level in Malaysia and Indonesia, especially amongst those who perceive themselves as forming part of a larger global *ummah* (community).

But increased cultural conservatism and religious identification does not explain the emergence of transnational terrorist networks nor the desire to establish exclusionist Islamic states in Southeast Asia. Neither does the Iranian Revolution of 1979, as Iranians are Shiite whereas Southeast Asian Muslims are predominantly Sunni. Saudi Arabia's strategy in promoting its austere literal version of Islam has not been widely discussed because of the aversion to evoking Saudi protests, especially in the United States, which has been dependent on Middle Eastern oil.

Although Western analysts have shied away from using the term Wahhabism, "the fact that Wahhabi-inspired ideas have been promoted in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia in the last thirty years through a variety of semi-official and official actors is undeniable".[10] The Taliban was "the final and the most formidable product of this long term strategy".[11] The Wahhabi influence has also been seen in Southeast Asia. This analysis has therefore deliberately referred to the impact of Wahhabism to describe the Islamist enterprise in Southeast Asia.

The Islamisation race in Malaysia has resulted in the Islamic discourse domain being dominated by conservative ulamas and advocates of Wahhabi austerity.[12] As one Malaysian Muslim intellectual advocates, it is critical that "moderate Muslims…reclaim centre stage".[13] A leading Malaysian scholar of contemporary Islam, Farish A Noor

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[10] Shireen T. Hunter, "Religion, Politics and Security in Central Asia", *SAIS Review*, 21, No. 2 (Summer-Fall 2001), p. 72-81.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] See D. Camroux, "State Responses to Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia: Accommodation, Co-option and Confrontation", *Asian Survey*, 1996, vol. xxxvi, no. 9, pp. 852-68, for an assessment of the major Islamic movements in Malaysia and the government organizations set up to counteract them. Also, Shamsul A.B. "Identity Construction, Nation Formation and Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia", in Hefner and Horvatich (eds.), *op.cit.,* pp. 207-227, for a discussion of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia within the context of redefining Malayness.

[13] Karim Raslan, "Now a Historic Chance to Welcome Muslims into the System", *International Herald Tribune*, 27 November 2001.

complains that "a moral and ideological crisis" has beset "the collective Muslim mind".[14] This perspective provoked the Thai Muslim scholar and former Foreign Minister of Thailand, Surin Pitsuwan, to lament that the spirit of inquiry which led Arab Muslim intellectuals of Islam's Golden Age to attain great heights of achievements in science, philosophy, mathematics and the arts a millennium ago has long been absent among the faithful. Surin Pitsuwan argues that the general principle in Southeast Asian *madrassahs* appears to be "memorization, stop thinking, stop rationalising".[15]

The most trenchant criticism of Wahhabism has come from Islamic scholars and analysts in Indonesia. Describing their movement as Liberal Islam, these activists believe that they are fighting a war against "extremism and fundamentalism" and the role of Literal Islam. However, Literal Islam is a term coined by the Liberal Islam activists. It is more appropriate to describe the advocates of Literal Islam as Wahhabis. The Wahhabis subscribe to the view that Muslims should be complete (*kaffah*) because Islam encompasses all aspects of life and a totally Islamic outlook is required. They advocate the establishment of an Islamic state, the implementation of *sharia* law and the imposition of state-sponsored codes of dress and public behaviour.[16]

First enunciated in 1999, Liberal Islam was initiated by a group of Jakarta-based intellectuals led by Ulil Abshar Abdalla and Luthfi Assyaukanie. In the familiar Indonesian style of coining acronyms, it is now known as "Islib". In March 2002, they established the Liberal Islam Network (*Jaringan Islam Liberal*) to disseminate their views through the media. An active website has been established (www.islamlib.com). In a moderated chat group, islamliberal@yahoogroups.com, they debate issues, respond to questions and views, cite the Koran to support their arguments and even provoke debates with their critics. Their website highlights issues on their agenda such as secularisation,

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[14] Personal communication cited in Barry Desker and Kumar Ramakrishna, "Forging an Indirect Strategy in Southeast Asia", *The Washington Quarterly* (Spring 2002), p. 172. For Farish Noor's views, see Farish Noor, *New Voices of Islam* (Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden, 2002).

[15] Surin Pitsuwan, Strategic Challenges Facing Islam in Southeast Asia", (Lecture delivered at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies and the Centre for Contemporary Islamic Studies, Singapore, 5 November 2001).

[16] The following section on the views of Liberal Islam follows Santi W.E. Soekanto, " 'Liberal' and 'Literal' Islam must sit and talk together", *The Jakarta Post*, 1 March 2002; Asep Saefull, "Penayangan Maya Islam Liberal", *Pantau*, Year 2, No. 021 (January 2002), p. 6-7, and information on its website (www.islamlib.com).

emancipation, power relations, pluralism, gender, democratisation, tolerance and human rights.

Members of Liberal Islam write a syndicated Sunday column published in the widely circulated *Jawa Pos* daily newspaper and forty regional Indonesian language newspapers including *Riau Pos* (Pekan Baru) and *Fajar* (Makassar). This ensures that the views of this group are the most widely distributed in Indonesia, even though its activists also write in the better known quality newspapers such as *Kompas* and *Jakarta Post*. A weekly talk show is broadcast every Thursday by Radio 68H and is relayed by 20 other radio stations throughout Indonesia. They have formed the Liberal Islam Writers Syndicate and have published booklets and pamphlets on controversial issues such as *jihad*, the *sharia* and the establishment of houses of worship.[17]

The key activists promoting the Liberal Islam movement in Indonesia have complementary strengths. Ulil Abshar-Abdalla is a columnist from a Nahdlatul Ulama background. Luthfi Assyaukanie is a lecturer at Universitas Paramadina and is cyber-savvy. Nong Darol Mahmada, the daughter of a Banten *kiai* (religious teacher), plays a key role in moderating radio discussions and raising women's awareness in the debate on issues affecting Islam. They have been able to attract well-known commentators of Islam to write columns and appear on their radio talk shows. Nurcholis Majid, the University of Chicago-trained intellectual who has campaigned for secularisation since the 1970s, has supported this movement.[18] Other major figures who have participated include Hasyim Muzadi and Mazdar F. Mas'udi of Nahdlatul Ulama, Syafii Ma'arif and Moeslim Abdurrachman of Muhammadiyah and Azyumardi Azra of the State Institute for Islamic Affairs (IAIN), Jakarta.[19]

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[17] Soekanto, *Ibid*.

[18] For Nurcholish Madjid's significant role in promoting neo-modernist ideas, see Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrachman Wahid as Intellectual Ulama: The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-modernist Thought", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (October 1997), vol. 8 (3), pp. 323-50.

[19] Saefull, *op.cit*., p. 7. Significantly, the proponents of Liberal Islam are drawn from both the traditionalist NU and modernist Muhammadiyah camps.

Liberal Islam activists have come from the network of State Institutes for Islamic Affairs (IAIN) and have often been educated at major Western universities including Chicago, Columbia, Leiden and London.   By contrast, proponents of Literal Islam tend to be educated at *madrassahs* in Pakistan or universities in Saudi Arabia if their training was in Islamic studies. Literal Islam activists in Malaysia and Indonesia have also frequently been graduates in science and engineering from universities in their home countries or from the West. Such science and engineering graduates have reflected a tendency to apply the analytical tools of the Western scientific tradition to the re-interpretation of Islam in a narrow, literal fashion.

The essence of the argument of Liberal Islam is the need for separation of religion and the state. Religion is regarded as a private matter, not a question of public concern. Literal Islam is regarded by 'Islib' as adopting literal interpretations of the Koran and the *hadiths*, resulting in extremist, even fundamentalist perspectives on politics and society. There are at least four organizations that Liberal Islam has categorised as Literal Islam groups: Laskar Jihad, Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front), Partai Keadilan (Justice Party) and Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Council for the Propagation of the Islamic Faith).[20]

Laskar Jihad, a Muslim militia, was born a year after the eruption of Christian/Muslim religious violence in Ambon, Maluku which began on 19 January 1999. Ulama and students from Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) went to Ambon to support their co-religionists, providing arms, manpower and food supplies. The commander of Laskar Jihad, Ja'far Umar Talib, also leads a *pesantren* in Jogjakarta. Ja'far studied in Pakistan in 1986 under the sponsorship of the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia. Ja'far had known Osama bin Laden when they were both Afghan *mujahideen* active in the resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Laskar Jihad was reportedly funded and supported by elements of the Indonesian army, including the Commander, Special Operations Command (KOSTRAD), Djaja Suparman.[21]

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[20] Soekanto, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

[21] For a discussion of the creation of Laskar Jihad, see Noorhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics: The Rise of the Laskhar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia", *Indonesia*, 73 (April 2002) pp. 145-169. Ja'far has been detained since 4 May 2002 for threatening President Megawati Soekarnoputri and her family. But he was visited in jail by Vice-President Hamzah Haz who described Ja'far as his "Muslim brother".

Front Pembela Islam is an organization dominated by Jakarta-based youths established shortly before the 1999 general elections and with links to elements of the Indonesian army. It has achieved notoriety in Indonesia because of its raids on bars and brothels. It demands the closure of places of gambling and prostitution, two vices that Islam deems as serious violations, and which, if left unchecked, would lead to even greater social ills, according to literal interpretations of the *hadiths*. Like Laskar Jihad, it is led by an ulama of Arab descent, Habib Rizieq Muhammad Shihab who studied earlier at King Muhammad ibn Saud University in Riyadh. (However, some observers claim that it is little more than a protection racket.)

Partai Keadilan was set up shortly before the 1999 general elections. It has a strong base on university campuses cultivated since the 1980s, is active in university mosques and in campus Islamic societies. Several of its leaders were educated in the United States, Europe and the Middle East. For example, Nurmahmudi Ismail, a graduate of Texas A&M University, became Abdurrachman Wahid's Minister of Forestry. The views of Partai Keadilan in favour of the establishment of an Islamic state have been influenced by fundamentalist Islamic perspectives influential in university campuses in the West.

Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Council for the Propagation of the Islamic Faith) is an organization for the propagation of Islam, set up in 1968 by the late Mohammad Natsir. He was a leader of the modernist Muslim party Masjumi and Prime Minister from September 1950 to March 1951 during the earlier period of parliamentary democracy (1950 - 1957). Natsir strongly opposed the Soeharto government. The Council has received financial support from the Saudi government and Natsir was supported by Saudi interests through his appointment as vice-president of the World Muslim Congress.

For the fundamentalists, Liberal Islam is seen as anathema, comprising Muslims who want to follow their own beliefs while claiming to be Muslims. Instead of a strict adherence to doctrines and teachings, supporters of Liberal Islam are perceived as re-interpreting texts handed down by the Prophet to suit their own convenience. 'Islib' is regarded as a group of secularists who are spreading confusion and disinformation among

the masses. Ironically, the debate between the Muslim fundamentalists and liberals mirrors similar debates between Christian fundamentalists and liberals.[22]

This analysis has included a detailed discussion of Liberal Islam because the viewpoint it has presented to the Indonesian public reflects the wide range of views within Indonesian society. Although 88% of the Indonesian population identifies itself as Muslim, the total vote obtained by all Islamic political parties in all general elections since 1955 has never exceeded 43.5% of the votes cast. Despite recurrent attempts to seek the adoption of *sharia* law in Indonesia since 1945, there has been declining support within Parliament for such a move on every occasion when the issue has been raised again. The latest attempt in 2001 was opposed by the two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. In the 1999 elections, the two largest political parties, Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (Perjuangan) and Golkar were secularist. Although Abdurrachman Wahid of NU was elected as President defeating Megawati Soekarnoputri of PDI-P, Wahid adopted secularist policies in government and had a reputation within Indonesia as a liberal thinker with an inclusivist outlook. Under his leadership, NU nurtured a group of eclectic intellectuals and thinkers who sought to re-define Islam to meet the needs of current society. However, because NU's roots were in the reaction to revivalist teachings originating in the Middle East, it has been described in the academic literature as traditionalist and perceived as old-fashioned.[23]

The views articulated by Liberal Islam therefore have wider resonance within Indonesian society and provide a window into the internal discourse in Indonesia. Nevertheless, Indonesia has become more *santri* (devout Muslim). There is an increase in the public and private practice of the Islamic faith but this should be distinguished from a turn towards the establishment of an Islamic state. Some have even observed that the Indonesian armed forces are represented by many more *santri* within its senior ranks today. However, this was a result of recruitment policies into the officer corps during the Soeharto era when there was an effort to draw in talent from around the archipelago. It was also a reflection of the absence of *santri* in command positions in the 1970s and 1980s

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[22] For criticisms of Liberal Islam by supporters of Literal Islam, see the website of the Indonesian Islam Information and Communications Centre (www.alislam.or.id.).

[23] A generation of scholars was influenced by Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Free Press, New York, 960). Geertz's perspective is critiqued in Hefner, *op.cit.* pp. 13-18.

as most *santri* officers had participated in the Dar-ul Islam revolt and the regionalist revolts of the 1950s.

Increased *santri* influence also arose from Soeharto's efforts to seek new sources of support following Soeharto's estrangement from senior leaders of the Indonesian armed forces in the late 1980s. The establishment of the Association of Indonesian Intellectuals (ICMI, *Ikatan Cendiakawan Muslim Se-Indonesia*) in December 1990 with Soeharto as its patron and Minister of Research and Technology B.J. Habibie as its chairman highlighted Soeharto's overtures to the Muslim community. Habibie's ascent to the Presidency of Indonesia in May 1998, following Soeharto's resignation in the aftermath of the anti-Chinese riots, paved the way for the appointment of leading Muslim activists to key positions in Habibie's administration.[24]

The perception of increased *santri* influence accompanied by resurgent Indonesian nationalism has shaped the Indonesian response to the issue of terrorism by Islamic fundamentalists in the region. The Indonesian government, press and public reacted with disbelief to reports that Indonesian ulama and their followers were at the core of planned attacks on American installations and other targets in the region. Although the Malaysian and Singapore governments have named the Chairman of the Indonesian Mujahideen Council, Abu Bakar Bashir, and Riduan Isamuddin (also known as Hambali) as "directing figures" of a transnational terrorist network, Bashir continues to move freely in Indonesia while Hambali is believed to be residing there.[25] The Malaysian authorities provided information to Indonesian security agencies on four tons of ammonium nitrate sent by detained Malaysia-based militants to Batam, an Indonesian island thirty minutes by boat

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[24] For a discussion of the transition from Soeharto to Habibie, see Leo Suryadinata, "A Year of Upheaval and Uncertainty: The Fall of Soeharto and the Rise of Habibie", *Southeast Asian Affairs 1999* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore 1999), pp. 111-127. Soeharto's overtures to the Muslim community is covered in Robert W. Hefner, "Islam, State and Civil Society: ICMI and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class", *Indonesia* No. 56 (1993), pp. 1-35 and R. William Liddle, "The Islamic turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 55, no. 3 (August 1996), pp. 613-634.

[25] Abu Bakar Bashir (known as Ba'asyir in Indonesia) runs Ngruki *pesantren*, a conservative Islamic boarding school in Solo. He was arrested in November 1978 for leading the Jemaah Islamiyah, a part of the clandestine Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) movement (better known at that time as Komando Jihad, a hard-line group fighting for an Islamic state). A nine year jail term was halved on appeal. Bashir fled to Malaysia on his release, returning to Indonesia in 1999 after the fall of Soeharto. The concept of Darul Islamiyah Nusantara was developed during their stay in Malaysia by Bashir and a fellow *ulama* who fled to Malaysia, the late Abdullah Achmad Sungkar, who was jailed in Indonesia for the same charge as Bashir and also had his jail sentence halved. For the earlier Jemaah Islamiyah link, see Noorhaidi Hasan, *op.cit.*, p.150.

from Singapore. However, no action was taken by the Indonesian Government. For regional leaders used to cooperation on security issues, the Indonesian response has come as a shock, particularly as Indonesia appears to have become a safe haven for terrorist threats to the surrounding region.

In the light of these revelations, Indonesia's unwillingness to act against Indonesian nationals involved in terrorist activities has raised concern around the region. Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, for example, has called on Indonesia to take action, resulting in strong responses from Jakarta highlighting the lack of legislation similar to the Internal Security Acts of Malaysia and Singapore. The Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs Nur Hassan Wirajuda claimed that Indonesia was a democracy, unlike authoritarian Singapore. However, the reality is that the political elite in Jakarta is aware of the increased clout of political Islam in Indonesia today. This constrains Indonesian Government responses to the demands from Indonesia's neighbours. The Muslim-dominated *Poros Tengah* (Middle Axis) led by Amien Rais was instrumental in denying the Presidency to Megawati Sukarnoputri in 1998 when it promoted the election of Adurrachman Wahid. Amien Rais' opposition to Wahid and agreement to Megawati's succession paved the way for Wahid's ouster and Megawati's election in July 2001. The Indonesian Council of Ulamas (MUI) issued a declaration on 25 September 2001 calling "on Muslims in the world for *jihad fii sabilillah* (fight in the path of Allah) should the aggression by the US and its allies against Afghanistan and the Islamic world occur".[26] An observer of Indonesian Islam described this declaration as "one of the harshest statements of support for the Taliban heard from any state-sponsored religious body in the Muslim world".[27] The increased influence of more extreme Muslim views received public attention when Umar Jafar Talib in flowing Arabic robes took centre stage opposite the American Ambassador at a dialogue session between Muslim leaders and ambassadors of major Western states on "Islam and the West: Working Together for a Peaceful World" on 26 March 2002.[28]

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[26] *Jakarta Post*, 26 September 2001.

[27] Robert W. Hefner, "Muslim Politics in Indonesia after September 11", Testimony to the US House of Representatives Sub-Committee on East Asia and the Pacific, 12 December 2001, available online at http://www.house.gov/international_relations/hefn1212.htm [accessed on 1 Aug 2002].

[28] Personal communication. See also *Kompas*, 26 March 2002, *Straits Times*, 28 March 2002.

Greg Fealy has observed that the ineptitude of Lt.Gen. (Ret) A.M. Hendropriyono has strengthened rather than allayed widespread suspicions in the Islamic community about the intentions underlying the anti-terrorism campaigns in Indonesia. As head of the State Intelligence Agency (BIN), Hendropriyono's allegations of al-Qaeda involvement in Indonesia and subsequent retractions undermined his credibility. Nevertheless Hendropriyono's unfortunate lack of circumspection should not be allowed to obscure the fact that because of domestic political concerns, the Indonesian leadership has not responded to evidence provided by the Malaysian, Singapore and Philippines authorities.[29]

An even greater shock to the region has been the sudden awareness that al-Qaeda linked radical Islamists were active in the region. In recent months, the Malaysian Government arrested more than 40 members of a militant Muslim group, the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (Malaysian Militant Movement). KMM has been implicated in bank robberies, murders and kidnapping. KMM was part of a larger network that intended to establish an Islamic state (Darul Islamiyah Nusantara) linking Malaysia, Indonesia, southern Thailand and the southern Philippines. The most extensive expose of the regional linkages of these radicals was contained in a Singapore Government statement on 11 January 2002. It stated that it had detained 13 members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a clandestine network with cells in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Surveillance had been mounted on the US, Israeli, British and Australian embassies, the Singapore Ministry of Defence and US companies in Singapore. JI had attempted to purchase 21 tons of ammonium nitrate to be used for truck bombs under the direction of a foreign al-Qaeda operative and bomb-maker with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).[30] The Philippines Government arrested the Indonesian bomb-maker, Fathur Rohman Al-Ghozi, as he was about to leave for Thailand. He admitted financing bombings that killed 22 people in Manila in December 2000 and his arrest led the Philippine authorities to one ton of explosives intended for attacks in Singapore.[31]

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[29] Greg Fealy "Why Indonesian Muslims are sceptical about terrorists in their midst, "AUS-CSCAP Newsletter No.13 (May 2002), pp. 17-18.

[30] "Yishun Target in Group's Plans", *Straits Times* (Singapore), 12 January 2002, p. A1.

[31] *Ibid.* See also Lee Kuan Yew, Text of Address to the IISS Asia Security Conference, Singapore, 31 May 2002, available online at http://www.iiss.org.uk/misc/shangri-la/kuan_yew.doc [accessed on 2 Aug 2002].

These regional terrorist networks indicate the dimensions of the new security challenges facing Southeast Asia. The transnational al-Qaeda terrorist network will be the major security threat to governments in the region over the next decade. Because of its regional network, Southeast Asia will remain a major centre of al-Qaeda activity. However, the identification of radical fundamentalist Islam with terrorist activity risks the spread of the perception that Islam is the cause of regional terrorism, especially in states where Muslims are minorities such as Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand. In reality, these radical fundamentalist Islamic terrorists represent the extreme manifestation of Wahhabism.

Even for Islamists committed to the need to establish Islamic states, the approaches taken will change over time. They will re-position themselves to take advantage of political opportunities while adjusting to a changing social environment. The objectives and goals of an Islamic state will be re-defined. In confronting states intent on retaining their existing identities, the strategies adopted will vary in the years ahead as they have in the past. Terrorist attacks and violent confrontations, public agitation, private resentments and attempts to infiltrate public spaces will occur. A key role will be played by Muslims from diverse backgrounds that will participate in the public debate. The debate within Indonesia sparked by Liberal Islam demonstrates one response to attempts by the Wahhabis to dominate the Islamic agenda. Its salience arises from the wider support provided by the larger community when such activists have moved to take the stage and debate issues. Similar responses elsewhere in the region will help to ensure that the Wahhabis do not emerge as the dominant voices in the Islamic debate.

Our discussion has shown that the debate within the Islamic communities in the region continues. Islam is not a monolithic entity within the region. Its believers stretch from secular modernists sensitive to the multi-religious, multi-cultural fabric of societies in the region, inclusivists aware of the accommodation that Islam had made with existing beliefs when it penetrated the region, to revivalists seeking a return to an Islamic Golden Age and terrorists intent on overthrowing existing regimes and creating a new Muslim state linking all the territories in the region with Muslim majorities.

From the perspective of regional order, the inaction of the Indonesian Government despite concrete evidence has undermined existing trends in regional security cooperation.

While proponents of ASEAN previously highlighted ASEAN's evolution into a security community[32] recent developments draw attention to the risks of more open borders resulting from ASEAN arrangements to encourage increased intra-regional communications, tourism and trade. It is a reminder that the creation and maintenance of a security community is dependent on the recognition by participating states that they need to cooperate when it is a neighbouring state that is threatened.

The frictions among ASEAN states following the arrests of radical Islamic terrorists highlights the decline in ASEAN's cohesion following the expansion of ASEAN to include all ten Southeast Asian states in the 1990's, the onset of the regional financial and economic crisis and the downfall of the Soeharto regime in Indonesia. Ironically, it was during this period that radical Islamists committed themselves to establishing an Islamic state unifying the Muslim majority territories of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, southern Philippines and southern Thailand. While Singapore does not have a Muslim majority, the JI activists planning terrorist attacks in Singapore concluded that its existence at the heart of Southeast Asia required Singapore's incorporation into Darul Islamiyah Nusantara. Even as the original members of ASEAN wrestled with the doctrines of non-intervention and non-interference in a world where the concept of humanitarian intervention has received increasing support, they were challenged by radical Islamists seeking to create a unified Islamic state through the violent overthrow of existing regimes, and heeding calls emerging from Afghanistan, for the establishment of a new caliphate.

Such irredentist visions highlight the fragility of the post-colonial states in Southeast Asia. The communications revolution has resulted in Southeast Asians receiving CNN images simultaneously with the rest of the world. Israeli attacks on Palestinian targets and US bombing of Osama bin Laden's hideouts in Afghanistan are immediately transmitted to the region. Political violence in Europe and the United States is replicated by terrorists in the region. Contrary to the image of strong states treading on the rights of citizens, the reality in Southeast Asia is that the state remains fragile and open to challenge in an era of political instability, economic stagnation and social disruption.

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[32] Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia* (Routledge, London, New York, 2001).

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