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## **RADICAL MUSLIMS IN INDONESIA: THE CASE OF JA'FAR UMAR THALIB AND THE LASKAR JIHAD**

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### **I. Introduction**

On April 6, 2000, thousands of people gathered in Senayan stadium, Jakarta. All of them wore white garb, and many brought swords. They were attending a mass religious rally (*tabligh akbar*) held in response to a religious conflict that had been taking place in the province of Maluku. The rally was also meant to declare the year 1412 Hijriah (Islamic year) as the year of *jihād*. After the rally, they marched to the Presidential Palace to meet President Abdurrahman Wahid in order to push the government to take necessary actions to curb the conflict and protect Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

The appearance of thousands of people, many of them carrying swords, but behaving in a highly disciplined manner like military people was shocking to those present. It implied that they were ready to wage a war and that this was their show of force. This phenomenon, covered by national and international mass media, then became a focus of discussion not only in Jakarta but among Indonesians in general. The group of people were members of the Laskar Jihad a paramilitary wing of the Forum Komunikasi Ahlussunah wal Jama'ah (FKAWJ), the Sunni communication forum, operating under the command of Ja'far Umar Thalib.

This event caught the attention of the international media, and in an article of the New York Times Magazine, Marshall described the Laskar Jihad as a "sleeper cell" of al Qaeda which was said to be aiding "the logistical relocation of al Qaeda forces, post-Taliban."<sup>2</sup> Ja'far is portrayed as "the most feared Islamic militant," who "would soon be mentioned in the same breath as Osama bin Laden."<sup>3</sup> According to Marshall's article, Ja'far's goal is "the establishment of an Islamic government in Indonesia."<sup>4</sup> In Indonesia, too, some people were concerned that this signified the increase of radical Islam in the country and

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<sup>1</sup> For a report of the event, see "Enam Wakil Laskar Jihad Bertemu Presiden," in *Kompas*, Apr. 7, 2000, p1

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Marshall, "The Threat of Jaffar," *The New York Times Magazine*, March 10, 2002, p. 45

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Marshall, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Marshall, *ibid.*, p. 47

represented a threat to religious harmony. Moreover, people feared it would worsen religious conflicts that had been taking place in several parts of the country. However, some Muslims, especially in the areas of conflict, welcomed and supported the group. They not only provided the group with funds, donations and various kinds of materials, such as clothes, food, and medicine, but they also joined the Laskar Jihad and were ready to be martyrs on the battle field. For about two years, before it was dissolved in October 2002 by the commander himself, Ja'far Umar Thalib, the group was very active in recruiting members, training them, and sending them to conflict areas in order to help their fellow Muslims.

In this paper, I will examine the issue of radical Islam in contemporary Indonesia, by examining the case of Ja'far Umar Thalib and the Laskar Jihad, in religious, historical and political context. First, I will elaborate on Islamic teachings that contain seeds of radicalism, as some verses in the Qur'an do lead some Muslims to be radical. Second, I will discuss historical cases of radical Muslims in Indonesia in order to show that radicalism among Muslims is not something novel. Next, I will elucidate socio-political conditions in Indonesia during the Suharto era, in order to give a background into why such movements emerged again at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The fourth part will sketch several similar Muslim radical organizations, which appeared during these decades. Then, in the most important part of the paper, I will discuss in detail the biography and ideology of Ja'far Umar Thalib, and the practices of the Laskar Jihad. As the central figure and leader of the Laskar Jihad, Ja'far's personal views are difficult to separate from the organization's views. The final section of the paper will discuss the ideological and practical factors which led to the dissolution of the Laskar Jihad and FKAWJ.

Before discussing radicalism in Islam it is worth defining radicalism. Literally, "radical" means "tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions." If it applies to a person, it means one that "advocates a decided and often extreme change from existing, usual, or traditional views, habits, conditions, or methods."<sup>5</sup> By this definition, the important characteristic of being radical is the "will" or the "effort" to uproot and reform established conditions. Being radical does not only mean "believing" in certain teachings but, more importantly, "advocating" the necessity of using extreme, even violent actions if necessary, although it should be noted that violence is not a universal characteristic of radicalism.

## II. Radicalism in Islam

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the highest source of laws governing their lives. This is because it is believed to be revealed by God. There is no question about this belief among Muslims. However, the way they understand and interpret verses of the Qur'an can differ from one person to the other. Some are more rational while

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<sup>5</sup> *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. Springfield: Merriam, 1971, p. 1872.

others are more scriptural. I will elaborate some verses that are always used by radical Muslims as the basis of their thought and action. I will also discuss Wahhabism that arose in Saudi Arabia and which has had a fundamental influence on the ideas of the Laskar Jihad. The following verses from the Qur'an are frequently referred to by radical Muslims:

*Those who do not judge by God's revelations are infidels indeed. And there (in the Torah) We had ordained for them a life for a life, and an eye for an eye, and a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds retribution, though he who forgoes it out of charity, atones for his sins. And those who do not judge by God's revelation are unjust... Let the people of the Gospel judge by what has been revealed in it by God. And those who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed are transgressors. And to you We have revealed the Book containing the truth, confirming the earlier revelations, and preserving them (from change and corruption). So judge between them by what has been revealed by God, and do not follow their whims, side-stepping the truth that has reached you. To each of you We have given a law and a way and a pattern of life... Judge between them in the light of what has been revealed by God (5:44-49).<sup>6</sup>*

By these verses, radical Muslims argue that all Muslims have to follow exactly what God has ordained (*shari'ah*). Muslims should not use secular laws which are produced by human beings because they will inevitably contradict the *shari'ah*. All sentences mentioned in the verses and others found in the Qur'an, such as stoning for adulterers, cutting off the hands of thieves, and flogging for drinkers, have to be implemented by Muslims. They understand the verses literally and scripturally and insist on implementing them as such. Those who reject this prescription, in their views, are not really Muslims.<sup>7</sup>

Radical Muslims also invoke verses about *jihad*, as follows:

*Those who barter the life of this world for the next should fight in the way of God. And we shall bestow on him who fights in the way of God, whether he is killed or is victorious, a glorious reward. ...Those who believe fight in the way of God; and those who do not, only fight for the powers of evil; so you should fight the allies of Satan. Surely the stratagem of Satan is ineffective. (4:74-76)<sup>8</sup>*

*You tell the unbelievers in case they desist whatever has happened will be forgiven them. If they persist, they should remember the fate of those*

<sup>6</sup> Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'an: a contemporary translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 103-104. The emphasis is added

<sup>7</sup> See Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, translated by Badrul Hasan (Karachi: International Islamic Publishers, 1981)

<sup>8</sup> Ali, *Al-Qur'an*, p. 83

who have gone before them. So, fight them till all opposition ends, and obedience is wholly God's. If they desist then verily God sees all they do. But if they are obstinate, know that God is your helper and protector: How excellent a helper, and how excellent a protector is He. (8:39-40)<sup>9</sup>

By these verses, radical Muslims argue that the *jihad* is obligatory for all Muslims, not only in the defensive meaning but also an aggressive one, in order to realize the glory of Islam.<sup>10</sup> The *jihad* is waged against those who do not accept the call (*da'wah*) of Islam and against unbelievers. However, sometimes *jihad* is also waged against those who declare themselves to be Muslims, because they are regarded as not truly Muslim by the radicals.<sup>11</sup> For this purpose, radicals refer to other verses, as follows:

Have you never seen those who aver they believe in what has been revealed to you, and had been revealed (to others) before you, yet desire to turn for judgment to evil powers (*taghoot*), even though they have been commanded to disbelieve in them... Indeed, by your Lord, they will not believe till they make you adjudge in their disputes and find no constraint in their minds about your decisions and accept them with full acquiescence. (4:60, 65)<sup>12</sup>

One of the most radical Muslim sects is the Wahhabists. Wahhabism is a sect in Islam founded for the first time by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in Saudi Arabia in the mid eighteenth century. This sect became very influential after the Sa'ud family, the ally and supporter of the sect, succeeded in establishing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia after World War I.<sup>13</sup> In recent times, however, the followers of this sect have been reluctant to use the term *Wahhabi* as it refers to the founder only. Instead, they prefer the term *Salafi* because according to them this sect basically refers to the practices of the *Salafi* (the first generation of Muslims) rather than just to the views of ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Some scholars use the term *Salafi-Wahhabi* to designate those who follow this school of thought.

The most important and defining belief for Muslims, according to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, is adherence to the principle of *tawhid* (absolute monotheism) and avoidance of *shirk* (attributing associates to God). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab argues that strict and absolute monotheism is the basis upon which Muslims practice their daily lives. With the true *tawhid*, Muslims should be able to avoid any kinds of *shirk*, greater or lesser, which could endanger their status as Muslims. He also advocates the importance of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) in the defining an Islamic law by referring directly to the Qur'an, *Hadith* (sayings

<sup>9</sup> Ali, *Al-Qur'an*, p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> Qutb, *Milestones*.

<sup>11</sup> See Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: the Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: McMillan, 1986)

<sup>12</sup> Ali, *Al-Qur'an*, p. 82

<sup>13</sup> For a criticism of Wahhabism, see Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: a Critical Essay* (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publication International, 2002).

and deeds of Prophet Muhammad), and practices of the *Salafi* people. Consequently, he denounces *taqlid* (blindly following the opinion of former Muslim scholars).<sup>14</sup> Based on stressing *ijtihad* and rejecting *taqlid*, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab instructs his followers to oppose all kinds of innovation (*bid'ah*) and superstition (*khurafat*) whether manifested in buildings or daily practices. Opposition to any innovation or superstitions is one of the most important signifiers of this sect.

It is believed that all these principles mentioned above should also be spread, especially to Muslims through *da'wah*. Therefore, *da'wah* is the most important activity for *Salafis*. *Da'wah* might be done through several ways, one of which is through education. The targeted priority of the *da'wah* among *Salafis* is Muslims, so that this sect is more inward looking than outward. For the purpose of *da'wah*, *jihad* (war) becomes lawful, though Ibn Abd al-Wahhab stresses the defensive aspect rather an active or aggressive one.<sup>15</sup>

### III. Historical Cases of Radical Muslims in Indonesia

The history of radical Muslims in Indonesia goes back to at least the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Padri movement rose in West Sumatera.<sup>16</sup> Initially, this was a revivalist movement led by three young Muslims who had just performed the Hajj pilgrimage in 1803, after the Wahhabi had captured Mecca and Medina. They tried to imitate Wahhabi ways in order to revive religious practices in West Sumatera.<sup>17</sup> Conflicts between the Padri and local leaders arose, and when the latter were almost completely defeated they invited the Dutch government to help them regain sovereignty over the area. The Padri movement was finally crushed by the Dutch military campaign and by 1938 it was totally finished.

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were two Muslim organizations that, to some extent, were radical: the Al-Irshad and the Persis. The Al-Irshad, or *Jam'iyyat al-Islah wa al-Irshad* (Union for Reformation and Guidance), was set up by a Sudanese-born preacher, Ahmad Surkati, in 1915.<sup>18</sup> The main purpose of al-Irshad is to reform religious practices, especially among Arab communities in Indonesia by referring directly to the Qur'an and the Hadith. In addition, al-Irshad also advocates equal treatment among Arab people. This is a response to the *Jami'at al-Khair*, another organization of Arabs living in

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's thought, see Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabis Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Delong-Bas, *Ibid.* p 193-225.

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of the Padri movement, see Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy* (London:Curzon Press, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> Dobbin, *ibid.*, p. 128-141.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion of Ahmad Surkati and his role in Al-Irshad, see Bisri Affandi, *Syaikh Ahmad Syurkati: Pembaharu dan Pemurni Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 1999).

Indonesia, which discriminates between people based on whether or not they are descendants of the Prophet. To spread these ideas, al-Irshad set up schools in some cities in Java, such as Jakarta, Tegal and Surakarta (Central Java), as well as Surabaya and Malang (East Java).

*Persatuan Islam* (Persis) was established in 1923 by a group of merchants in Bandung. A year later, a Singapore-born Tamil, A. Hassan, joined this group and he made Persis the most extreme Muslim organization at the time.<sup>19</sup> A. Hassan is known as a harsh critic of traditional religious practices that he claimed were innovations (*bid'ah*) and superstitions (*khurafat*). In addition, he also opposed the idea of nationalism because Muslims should not be separated by nations. He argued that Muslims should be united under one *dawlah* (state). Similar to Al-Irshad, Persis under the leadership of A. Hassan is more concerned with education as a means of disseminating these ideas. A. Hassan himself then established an Islamic educational institution, *Pesantren Persis*, in Bangil, East Java, where Ja'far Umar Thalib was to study for two years.

After independence, Indonesia was shaken by a rebellion that erected the banner of Islam. Disappointed with an agreement between the Indonesian government and the Dutch, known as the *Renville* agreement, in 1948, a Javanese mystic, S.M. Kartosuwiryo (1905-62) seceded from the state of Indonesia and declared the *Negara Islam Indonesia* (NII, Indonesian Islamic State) covering most of West Java.<sup>20</sup> In the 1950s, this rebellion which is also popularly known as the *Darul Islam* (DI, the Islamic State) movement, spread to South Sulawesi and Aceh under the leadership of Kahar Muzakkar and Daud Beureu'eh, respectively.<sup>21</sup> This movement was basically more political than religious. The leaders were dissatisfied with the policies of the central government under President Sukarno. However, they used Islam to legitimize their existence and at the same time to denounce the nation-state of Indonesia.

The history of radicalism in Indonesia shows that there are at least two types of radicals: those who involve violence in their efforts to achieve their goals, such as the Padri and the NII, and those who mainly used educational institutions in order to change current conditions, such as Al-Irshad and Persis.

#### IV. Socio-Political Condition of Indonesia

<sup>19</sup> For further discussion on the Persis, see Howard Federspiel, *Persatuan Islam: Islamic Reform in Twentieth Century Indonesia* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1970). For the discussion of A. Hassan's thought, see Akh. Minhaji, *Ahmad Hassan and Islamic Legal Reform in Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Kurnia Kalam Semesta Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion of the NII, known also as Darul Islam, see Karl D. Jackson, *Traditional Authority, Islam and Rebellion: a Study of Indonesian Political Behavior* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). See also Cornelis van Dijk, *Rebellion under the Banner of Islam: the Darul Islam in Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981)

<sup>21</sup> Hendra Gunawan, *M. Natsir dan Darul Islam: Studi Kasus Aceh dan Sulawesi Selatan Tahun 1953-1958* (Jakarta: Media Dak'wah, 2000)

When Suharto assumed the presidency following the abortive coup by the Communist Party in 1965, he was fully supported by Muslim groups, especially those in the parliament. However when his position was secure, in the early 1970s, he started to “depoliticize” Islam. Suharto, for example, did not approve of Muslim aspirations to revive the Masyumi Party, which had been banned by Sukarno in the 1950s. He then reduced political parties into three, pushing all the Muslim parties to unite in the *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (United Development Party) while all Christian and Nationalist parties were combined in the *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* (Indonesian Democracy Party). Suharto also introduced laws on marriage and on *aliran kebatinan* (local belief) which disappointed Muslim people. The law on marriage would compel Muslims to register their marriage at the government office and restrict some accepted practices, such as polygamy, which was allowed according to Islamic law. The law on *aliran kebatinan* made Muslims worried that local beliefs would be acknowledged as one of the formal religions, equal to those of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

In pursuit of stability and development, Suharto made security the first priority of his policies so that he tightly controlled those who could potentially oppose him. Religious groups were among those his regime targeted. Muslim preachers were under surveillance and they had to have permission before they delivered sermons. Those who criticized the government were easily detained and jailed, some without trial. The peak of the policy took place in the mid 1980s, when Suharto required all societal, political and religious organizations to accept *Pancasila*, the state ideology, as their sole basis.<sup>22</sup>

Most Indonesian Muslims had no choice but to accept these policies, in order to avoid being repressed by the government. Some of them chose to leave the country, such as Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, as will be discussed later. Some of them, however, continued to oppose and criticize Suharto era policies, not in public but in limited underground meetings. Small underground religious groups, called *usrah*, then appeared throughout the country, especially surrounding university campuses in big cities. These groups organized their activities clandestinely and always moved from one place to another. Most were preoccupied with disseminating puritanical teachings of Islam in response to disappointing contemporary political conditions.<sup>23</sup>

In the late 1980s, the government eased its tight policy over Muslims. This was marked by several political gestures. For example, in December 1990, *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* (ICMI, the Indonesian Union of Muslim Intellectuals) was established and headed by B.J. Habibie, at the time the Minister of Research and Technology. Suharto, his family and several cabinet members performed pilgrimages to Mecca in 1991 and thus adopted the title of Haji. In the

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<sup>22</sup> For further discussion on relation between Islam and the state, see Bahtiar Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia* (Athens and Singapore: Ohio University Press and ISEAS, 2003)

<sup>23</sup> Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni, *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2004), p. 57-60

same year, the *Bank Mu'amalat Indonesia* (the Islamic Bank of Indonesia) was established.<sup>24</sup> However, these gestures did not reduce the spread of the *usrah*. The *usrah* movement kept flourishing until Suharto stepped down in 1998. B.J. Habibie, who was the vice president at the time, assumed the presidency and he declared his era to be the era of *Reformasi* (reform).

President Habibie enacted drastic policies by loosening control over political and religious groups. In the first weeks of his presidency, Habibie released many political prisoners, mostly Muslim activists, who had been jailed during Suharto's time. He also agreed to change the law relating to public elections. With the new law, there was no restriction on the number of political parties. More than a hundred new political parties were established during this time, although only 48 of them were eligible for the 1999 elections. The policy of releasing control was continued by the next elected president, Abdurrahman Wahid. It was during this period, in which freedom of speech was granted and there were no more political restrictions that radical Muslim organizations appeared in public. Some of them were newly established but some others had been in existence for a long time and only recently emerged into public view.

The appearance of radical Muslim groups was welcomed by some Indonesians who were experiencing economic hardships as a result of the 1997 economic crisis that affected many countries in Asia, especially Indonesia<sup>25</sup> Hundreds of thousands if not millions of people lost their jobs due to the crisis. The rhetoric offered by the radicals, "back to *shari'ah* as the only solution for the crisis," seemed to have attracted some of those affected by the crisis. Although this is a utopian and millenary promise, some of them joined the radical organizations for that reason.

## V. The Rise of Contemporary Radical Muslim Organizations

Several Muslim organizations appeared in the 1990s and in early 2000. They are, among others, *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (the Council of Indonesian Jihad Fighters), *Front Pembela Islam* (the Front of Defenders of Islam), *Hizbut Tahrir* (the Liberation Party), and *Forum Komunikasi Ahlussunnah wal-Jama'ah* (the Communication Forum of Sunni). They share similar concerns in some aspects, such as implementation of the *shari'ah*, but they have different ways of advocating their concerns. They also have similar agendas of challenging domination and the influence of Western countries, especially the US. They might maintain connecting networks, but each is certainly a separate organization. The interesting thing is that almost all of them are led by Arab descendants, which has

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<sup>24</sup> M.C. Rickelfs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since 1200*, Third Edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 391-395

<sup>25</sup> Kees van Dijk, *A Country in Despair: Indonesia between 1997 and 2000* (Leiden: KITLV, 2001), p. 71-111



been interpreted by some scholars as indicating a trend towards “Arabicization” of Islamic movements in Indonesia.<sup>26</sup>

The Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) was established on August 7, 2000 as the result of the congress of the Counsel of Indonesian Mujahidin, held in Yogyakarta. The congress itself was attended by about 1800 people from 24 provinces in Indonesia. Some of them were veterans of the Afghanistan war, others were religious leaders who hoped for the implementation of *shari’ah* in Indonesia, and some were former members of the Darul Islam (DI) movement. The latter causes some scholars to argue that MMI is a continuation of the DI.<sup>27</sup> This is supported by the fact that the main purpose of the MMI is similar to that of the DI: to establish an Islamic state as a condition for the implementation of the *shari’ah*. The members of this group also praised Kartosuwiryo, who had declared the NII over forty years before, as a *mujahid* and not as a rebel.<sup>28</sup>

When it was established, the MMI was meant as a federation or an alliance of existing Muslim organizations, and also included individuals who were concerned with the implementation of the *shari’ah*. However, the mechanism of the alliance was not clearly defined; the roles between the unifying and unified organizations were not obvious; there were also no criteria as to the kind of organizations that could join the alliance. MMI soon developed as an independent organization like similar groups. The MMI no longer included organizations such as FPI and FKAWJ, but drew on individuals recruited through the network of the *Pesantren* (Islamic education institution) in Ngruki, Solo, Central Java.<sup>29</sup> This *pesantren* itself was built by Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba’asyir in 1974.

The leader of the MMI is Abu Bakar Ba’asyir. He has been known for a long time as a strong advocate of an Islamic state, together with Abdullah Sungkar. During Suharto’s time, in 1978, both Sungkar and Ba’asyir were jailed for four years because they were accused of being rebels against the government for their *da’wah* in establishing an Islamic state as well as their harsh criticism of Suharto’s policies. After being released from jail in 1982, they did not stop opposing the government. When the government introduced the policy of *Pancasila* as the sole basis for all organizations in the mid 1980s, both rejected the policy. They were aware that they could be jailed for the second time by the government; therefore, before this could happen, both escaped and went to live in Malaysia. After Suharto stepped down in 1998, both returned home in October 1999. However, Sungkar passed away not long afterwards.

Some commentators have seen a connection between the MMI and the *Jama’at Islamiyah* (JI), a suspected al-Qaeda cell operating in the Southeast Asia, but this is debatable. Abu Bakar Ba’asyir is believed to be the *amir* (the top leader)

<sup>26</sup> Azyumardi Azra, “Recent Development of Indonesian Islam”, *The Indonesian Quarterly*, 32, 1 (2004), p. 16

<sup>27</sup> Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni, *Gerakan Salafi*, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> Irfan S. Awwas, the chief executive of the MMI, clearly states that view in his book. See, Irfan S. Awwas *Menelusuri Perjalanan Jihad SM Kartosuwiryo: Proklamator Negara Islam Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Wihdah Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni, *Geraka Salafi*, p. 60-61

of the JI,<sup>30</sup> but he always insists that this is not so and he even argues that the JI is basically a West-made term used for discrediting Muslims. Currently he is jailed on two different charges. The first is for falsifying immigration documents when he left for Malaysia and the second is for his involvement in the Bali bombings. For the latter, the court issued the verdict in January 2005, finding him guilty and jailing him for two years and six months.<sup>31</sup>

The Front Pembela Islam (FPI) was established in August 1998 by some Arab-descendant *ulama* in Jakarta. The founders were motivated by their conviction that Muslims in Indonesia were suppressed by the government. Muslims in Indonesia experienced many abuses of human rights and there had been no fair and just investigation of these cases. In addition, FPI leaders also believed that Islam and Muslim people had been humiliated and that Muslims did not respond sufficiently.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the main objectives of the group are to help Muslims who experience suppression from either the government or non-Muslims, to defend the greatness and holiness of Islam, and to revive the spirit (*ruh*) of *jihad*. The implementation of *shari'ah* is also another objective of the FPI, through what is called *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (to command righteousness and to prevent evilness), but the agenda of this group does not include establishing an Islamic state.<sup>33</sup>

The FPI leader is Habib Muhammad Rizieq who was born in Jakarta in 1965. He graduated from the King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 1990, majoring in Islamic law. According to Rizieq, all the socio-economic problems of Indonesians are because Muslims do not follow the rules that God has ordained and instead use secular ways. Therefore, he calls for Muslims to return to the *shari'ah*. Rizieq argues that since people are creatures of God, to follow the *shari'ah* is an absolute requirement. The government's current policy of decentralization is perceived by Rizieq as a good opportunity to insert Islamic laws into secular laws. Rizieq has therefore encouraged local branches of this group to work closely with local parliamentary councils in order to participate actively in drafting local laws.

It is unknown how far Rizieq and his group have inserted Islamic laws, but many people recognize the FPI as a group which has tried to close entertainment centers, such as discotheques and night clubs. This happens especially during the fasting month, *Ramadhan*, in Jakarta and Solo, Central Java. Every *Ramadhan* there have been instances in which members of the group come to night clubs, instructing them to close and, in some cases, destroying and looting them.

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<sup>30</sup> See the reports of ICG, *Indonesia Background: How the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates*, December 2002, and *Jama'ah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia: Damaged but Still Dangerous*, August 2003.

<sup>31</sup> *Kompas*, March 3, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni, *Geraka Salafi*, 131-132

<sup>33</sup> Jajang Jahroni, "Defending the Majesty of Islam: Indonesia's Front Pembela Islam (FPI) 1998-2003," *Studia Islamika*, 11(2), 2004, p. 197-253

According to them, they take such actions because the government does not take any concrete action to stop those “immoralities.”<sup>34</sup>

A third group, the Hizbut Tahrir (HT) is a political organization which was founded in 1952 in Lebanon by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, a Palestinian-born man who left his country after the Israeli invasion in 1948. It is unclear when HT came to Indonesia, but some scholars argue this happened around the 1970s.<sup>35</sup> During Suharto’s time this group remained underground, moving from one mosque to another and avoided any documentation that might uncover its presence. Therefore, its existence was not known until Suharto stepped down. During the era of *Reformasi* this group made its appearance through public several rallies. However, HT has never revealed the leader of its Indonesian branch. So far, people only know that Ismail Yusanto normally represents the group, but he claims that he is just the spokesperson. It might be that the bitter experiences of HT leaders in Arab countries, where they have been repressed, tortured, and jailed, has influenced this group not to disclose its leadership.

Like other groups, HT also advocates the implementation of the *shari’ah* in daily life. According to this group, Islam is not just a religion but also a political system (*al-din wa al-dawlah*). Therefore, the most important objective of the group is to establish an Islamic *khilafah* (caliphate). It idealizes one government for all Muslims in the world as occurred during the era of the Prophet and the Companions (*sahabat*). This means that Muslims should not be divided into many states but should be under one *khilafah*. It is not surprising that this group rejects the idea of nationalism or a nation-state.

The objective of reviving the Islamic caliphate is a response to the domination of the Western powers. According to this group, the influence and control by the West, especially the US, in Muslim countries is unacceptable. This influence is not only limited to the economy, but also applies to political and military affairs. When the US unilaterally invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, no single Muslim country, in the view of this group, opposed or challenged it in a significant manner. This confirms the weak position of Muslim countries vis-à-vis the West. The only way to respond to the domination of the Western powers, according to HT, is to establish an Islamic *khilafah*.

Among these groups the *Forum Komunikasi Ahlussunnah Wal Jama’ah* (FKAWJ)<sup>36</sup> has emerged as the most controversial. It was established by Ja’far Umar Thalib during a mass religious rally (*tabligh akbar*) at Manahan Stadium in Solo, Central Java, on February 14, 1999. The establishment of this forum was

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<sup>34</sup> However, FPI does not take this action against all night clubs, but only selected numbers. Therefore, this results in a rumor that those which FPI targets are those which do not respond to FPI’s demands. It is said that FPI requests funds to night clubs as a concession to be left undisturbed.

<sup>35</sup> Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni, *Geraka Salafi*, p. 169. Azra argues that it came to Indonesia in 1972. See, Azyumardi Azra, “Recent Development,” p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> This should not be confused with *ahlussunnah wal-jama’ah* among the *Nahdlatul Ulama*, a social organization of traditional Muslims in Indonesia. This group has claimed as the follower of Sunni far before FKAWJ exists.

initially to respond to social-political changes resulting from the fall of President Suharto. As the elections approached, two candidates appeared the most likely to be elected president: BJ Habibie, the former vice president during Suharto and the incumbent President; and Megawati Sukarnoputri, the leader of the Reformed Indonesian Democracy Party (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, PDIP) and a daughter of the first President, Sukarno. Influenced by *Salafi-Wahhabi* teachings, Ja'far and his network were opposed to female leadership, so the rally was meant, partly, to denounce Megawati's candidacy.

After the establishment of FKAWJ, Ja'far declared his outrage over the continuing religious conflicts in Ambon, Maluku, where he believed Muslims had become innocent victims of their Christian fellows.<sup>37</sup> He was convinced that the government had not taken decisive actions in order to stop the conflict and violence. Therefore, Ja'far took up their cause. During the mass rally at Kridosono Stadium, Yogyakarta, on January 30, 2000 he announced his commitment to assist his Muslim fellows by establishing the Laskar Jihad, a paramilitary wing of FKAWJ. The main purpose of the Laskar Jihad was to recruit people, train them and deploy them in Ambon in order to help and protect their Muslim brothers from the Christian attacks.

The Laskar Jihad is the vanguard of FKAWJ. Although formally, FKAWJ is an umbrella organization for Laskar Jihad, the latter is more popular for Indonesians because involvement in the religious conflict in Ambon was the most visible activity of the FKAWJ while the banner raised during the time was that of the Laskar Jihad. The two then became identical since both were under the control of Ja'far Umar Thalib. The fact that Ja'far is very influential in this group is unquestionable. It is even impossible to distinguish Ja'far's action personally from that institutionally. The discussion of Ja'far and the Laskar Jihad, therefore, is interchangeable and will overlap.

## VI. Biographical Sketch of Ja'far Umar Thalib

Ja'far was born in Malang, East Java in December 1961, and a descendant of a religious Yemeni-Madurese family. His father, Umar Thalib, is an activist of al-

<sup>37</sup> It was reported that on December 27 and 31, 1998, Muslims in Air Bak village, Ambon, were attacked by some Christians. Then, on January 15, 1999 Muslims in Dobo, Southeast Maluku, were also victimized by Christians. After that, on January 19, 1999, or a day after 'Id al-Fitr, clash between Muslims and Christians broke in Ambon. According to the official Police report released on Jan 21, 1999, 22 people were dead while 102 were severely wounded, and 42 others were slightly injured. In addition, 107 houses were burned, 7 buildings for worship were looted, and several other buildings, such as markets, shops, banks as well as cars were smashed. See, Jajang Jahroni et. al., *Hubungan Agama dan Negara di Indonesia: Studi tentang Pandangan Politik Laskar Jihad, Front Pembela Islam, Ikhwanul Muslimin dan Laskar Mujahidin*. Jakarta: INSEP, 2004. A year later, Brigadier General Max Tamaela, the Commander of Regional XVI/Pattimura, reported that between December, 26, 1999 and January 16, 2000, 771 people were killed, 559 seriously injured and 305 lightly wounded. See *Kompas*, January 17, 2000. Both reports do not really mention how many of the victims are Muslims and how many are Christians.

Irshad (the modernist Muslim organization of Arab descendants discussed earlier), and a veteran of the famous November 10, 1945 “war of Surabaya.”<sup>38</sup> The mass media describe Ja’far in various ways: as “a hardliner ‘*alim*,”<sup>39</sup> “a colorful religious leader,”<sup>40</sup> as well as “a convincing leader.”<sup>41</sup> An Australian Indonesianist, Greg Fealy, notes that Ja’far was both a revered and a feared leader.<sup>42</sup> The quality of Ja’far’s leadership, according to an education expert, Muhammad Sirozi, was the result of three related lines of education: informal education he received from his father, formal school education, and non-formal education such as his involvement in the *Salafi-Wahhabi* movement in Pakistan and his experience as a holy war fighter in Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

Ja’far received his early education in Islam and Arabic from his father who educated him in a “military style of education.”<sup>44</sup> His father’s previous involvement in warfare seems to have influenced his methods of instruction. However, the young Ja’far was also “rebellious” in character. He was “critical,” “always dissatisfied,” and “applying different lifestyles.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Ja’far was used to being punished and beaten with rattan by his father when he made mistakes. “Studying Arabic from my father was like being in a boxing ring,”<sup>46</sup> said Ja’far about his father’s teaching style.

Ja’far began his formal education at the *Pesantren al-Irshad* (a boarding school) run by his father in Malang. He continued his studies at the Religious Teacher Education (*Pendidikan Guru Agama*, PGA) run by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, also in Malang. After graduating from PGA in 1981, Ja’far went to *Pesantren Persis* in Bangil, East Java, to continue his study of Islamic knowledge. He spent only two years in Bangil because he was dissatisfied with the teaching-learning process. He moved to Jakarta and studied at *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab* (LIPIA), or the Institute for Islamic Knowledge and Arabic, an educational institution funded by the Saudi Arabian government. He studied there for three years but left the institute without completing his study

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Sirozi, “The Intellectual Roots of Islamic Radicalism in Indonesia,” *the Muslim World*, 95, January 2005, page 84-85. The war of Surabaya broke out when the Allied forces, specifically the British, tried to disarm the Japanese forces following the surrender of Japan in the World War II. Indonesians who had declared the independence on August 17, 1945, tried to resist the British and Dutch’s plan to re-colonize Indonesia. The local British commander, Brigadier-General Mallaby was killed in the battle so the British troops bombarded the city. The day is now commemorated as the Hero’s Day (*Hari Pahlawan*). See Ricklefs, *A History*, p. 266-267. For further discussion, see Nugroho Notosusanto, *The Battle of Surabaya* (Jakarta: Dept. of Defense and Security, Centre for Armed Forces History, 1970)

<sup>39</sup> *Suara Merdeka*, October 20, 2002

<sup>40</sup> “Sang Ustad yang Penuh Warna,” *Tempo Interaktif* available at <http://www.tempointeraktif.com/harian/profil/prof-jafar.html>

<sup>41</sup> *Tempo Interaktif*, *ibid*

<sup>42</sup> Greg Fealy, “Inside the Laskar Jihad: An Interview with the Leader of a New, Radical and Militant Sect,” *Inside Indonesia* 65, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit65/fealy/htm>

<sup>43</sup> Muhammad Sirozi, “The Intellectual Roots,” p. 93

<sup>44</sup> *Tempo Interaktif*

<sup>45</sup> *Tempo Interaktif*. It was not mentioned, what kind of “different lifestyles” mentioned here.

<sup>46</sup> *Tempo Interaktif*.

after he was involved in disputes with one of his lecturers. With the help of the LIPIA Director, in 1986 Ja'far received a scholarship from the Saudi government to continue his studies at the Maududi Institute in Lahore, Pakistan. After one year at the institute, Ja'far again quarreled with one of his lecturers and in 1987 he decided to leave the institute without finishing his education. In terms of his educational story, a news magazine labeled him an "adventurer."<sup>47</sup>

Ja'far's educational history shows his "rebellious" character. He had strong convictions and dared to challenge those who differed from his convictions. When he felt that he faced a "wall" he preferred to step aside. It is unclear, however, what issues made Ja'far oppose his lecturers, both in the LIPIA and the Maududi Institute. He mentions that he disagreed with his lecturer in Pakistan regarding a *Hadith*.<sup>48</sup> But he does not explain further as to why these differences led him to leave the institution. Ja'far also mentions that he was shocked when he found that *Ikhwanul Muslimin* thinkers, especially Sayyid Qutb, whom he previously admired, were harshly criticized by *Salafi* people. However, after having discussion with *Salafi* activists when he visited Peshawar, he started familiarizing himself with *Salafi-Wahhabi* thoughts. It was in Peshawar, Ja'far says, that for the first time he began to admire the *Salafis*. In Peshawar, too, he began to empathize with the Afghanistan *mujahidin* movement against the Soviet invasion. This brought him to join the movement after he decided to leave the institute in Lahore.

Ja'far was in Afghanistan for about two years, 1987-1989. He says that he joined the *mujahidin* purely because of a feeling of Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*). During his time in Afghanistan, Ja'far acknowledges that he met Osama bin Laden, but denies any connection with him. He even criticizes Osama as lacking Islamic knowledge. "He was spiritually an empty man. His had no religious knowledge at all," said Ja'far.<sup>49</sup> He also argues that Osama is an arrogant man who poured scorn on Saudi Arabia. Therefore, he did not join Osama's group while he was in Afghanistan but instead joined a faction connected with a *Salafi* organization in Saudi Arabia, the *Jama'at al-Da'wa ila al-Qur'an wa Ahl al-Hadith*, led by Jamil al-Rahman.<sup>50</sup> Later on, Ja'far quoted a *fatwa* issued by the late grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, that Osama "is an erring sectarian and rebel whom pious Muslims should never follow."<sup>51</sup>

In Afghanistan, Ja'far not only learned how to use arms and to battle against enemies, but also was exposed to *Salafi-Wahhabi* teachings delivered by Jamil al-Rahman. When the war was over and he came back to Indonesia in 1989, he spent less than two years in Salatiga, Central Java, as the director of the Al-

<sup>47</sup> *Forum Keadilan*, May 20, 2001

<sup>48</sup> *Tempo Interaktif*.

<sup>49</sup> Andree Marshal, "The Threat of Jafar," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> Muhammad Sirozi, "The Intellectual Roots," p. 90. See also Nurhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics: The Rise of the Laskar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia," *Indonesia*, 73 (April 2002), p. 152; and *Forum Keadilan*

<sup>51</sup> Muhammad Sirozi, "The Intellectual Roots," p. 91

Irshad Islamic School, before again leaving for North Yemen in 1991. In Yemen, Ja'far widened his knowledge on *Salafi* teachings by studying with Sheikh Muqbil ibn Hadi al-Wadi'i. Sheikh Muqbil is known as the leading figure of *Salafi* Islam in Yemen. Supported by the conservative Islamist *Islah* party, he is active in implementing *Salafi* teachings. In addition to Sheikh Muqbil, Ja'far also learned *Salafi* teachings from prominent Saudi scholars, such as Muhammad Nasr al-Din al-Albani and Abd al-Aziz Abd Allah bin Baz, when he performed the *hajj* pilgrimage.<sup>52</sup> This shows that it was after his involvement as a *mujahidin* guerilla that Ja'far became so fascinated with *Salafi-Wahhabi* teachings.

Ja'far came back to Indonesia in 1993. Having widened and deepened his knowledge of *Salafi-Wahhabi*, Ja'far is committed to spreading *Salafi* thoughts in Indonesia through *da'wah* and education. Therefore, he did not return to the al-Irshad school, which he previously managed, but built a new *pesantren* which he called *Ihya al-Sunnah* ("Preserving the Prophet's tradition"), in Degolan, about 15 kilometers north of Yogyakarta. Ja'far wants to disseminate *Salafi-Wahhabi* thoughts among young Indonesians in this educational institution. It is not surprising that the books he uses are by *Salafi* scholars, such as *al-Usul al-Thalathah* (Three Basic Principles), *Sharh Kitab al-Tawhid* (Explanation on Islamic Theology), both written by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and *al-Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah* (the Middle Path Ideology), by Ibn Taimiyah.<sup>53</sup> These three books are intended to strengthen students' knowledge about basic Islamic ideology and theology, as interpreted by *Salafi* scholars.

Ja'far is also involved in the *Salafi* network in Indonesia, which is connected with both the Yemen and Saudi Arabian *Salafi* network. Among the most important members of the network is Umar as-Sewed. This *Salafi* network is different from other *Salafi* groups, such as Al-Irshad whose school in Salatiga was managed by Ja'far in 1989-1991. While Ja'far and his network refer primarily to Yemeni and Saudi *ulama*, the *Al-Irshad* network, led by Yusuf Baisa, refers to Kuwait scholars, such as Sheikh Abdurrahman Abd al-Khaliq. The two factions compete with each other in claiming to be the most authoritative *Salafi* group in Indonesia. Ja'far and his group seem to have overshadowed Yusuf. In fact, the mass rally in February 1999 was partly to show Ja'far's greater influence in contrast to al-Irshad's network.<sup>54</sup>

For a few years Ja'far was preoccupied with teaching and disseminating *Salafi-Wahhabi* thoughts to his students in the *pesantren* as well as being involved in the *Salafi* network *da'wah*. For the *da'wah* outside the *pesantren*, Ja'far often gave religious lectures and sermons at discussion groups known as *halaqah* (study circle) which had sprung up since the 1980s among university students in Yogyakarta. As this city has many universities, there is a very large number of young people living there. Some are eager to learn and deepen their Islamic

<sup>52</sup> Muhammad Sirozi, "The Intellectual Roots," p. 97

<sup>53</sup> *Tempo Interaktif*

<sup>54</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix*, September 2004, p. 12-15

knowledge while studying sciences at the universities. Due to his mastery in religious knowledge, Ja'far was quickly popular and influential among the university students. The network of university students that Ja'far built up while undertaking his *da'wah* activities subsequently became an important source for recruiting members of the Laskar Jihad.

Outside Yogyakarta, however, Ja'far was relatively little known until he organized mass rallies in 1999 and 2000, in which he announced the establishment of the FKAWJ and the Laskar Jihad respectively. Following the rallies, especially that in Jakarta, Ja'far and the Laskar Jihad were prominently featured in news headlines in the mass media and became even more widely known. Ja'far's face frequently appeared on television, and he was interviewed by journalists. Although other members of the *Salafi* network criticized his popularity, this did not lessen his preparations for *jihad*. He remained firm in his decision to take up arms in defense of his fellow Muslims.

## VII. The Laskar Jihad: Its Principles and Activities

As indicated by its name, physical *jihad* is one of the most important principles of this group. After Ja'far declared the establishment of the Laskar Jihad on January 30, 2000, it began to recruit members who were ready to wage war in Ambon. Many *posko* (center of command or communication) were set up in numerous urban centers, located in strategic places and indicated with a large banner, "Invitation to Jihad in Maluku," that could easily be seen by people who passed by. The *posko* was where people registered for membership, and thus became candidates for the status of *mujahidin* (warriors), or gave donations to support the goals of the *jihad*. Since the *jihad* was the main reason for becoming a member of the group, we can assume that those who registered were ready to go to the battle field. To the surprise of most commentators, there were substantial numbers of men who were sufficiently enthusiastic to respond to the "invitation." Fajar, a university student in Surabaya, East Java, for example, said that the reason he joined the Laskar Jihad was that he could not accept the humiliation of Islam in Ambon.<sup>55</sup> Arif Yani, a teacher at a junior secondary school in Kuningan, West Java, preferred to leave his job and join the Laskar Jihad for similar reasons.<sup>56</sup> In the mass rally on April 6, 2000, in Jakarta, Ja'far claimed that 3000 men had joined the Laskar Jihad, had received military training and were ready to go to Ambon.

As a *Salafi* follower, Ja'far did not forget to seek endorsement from both Yemeni and Saudi *Salafi* scholars. Seven *Salafi* scholars issued *fatwas* that, according to Ja'far, approved the plan of *jihad* in helping Muslim fellows in Ambon.<sup>57</sup> They were Sheikh Abd al-Muhsin al-Abbad, a Medina mufti; Sheikh

<sup>55</sup> *Gatra*, March 25, 2000, p. 68

<sup>56</sup> *Gatra*, April 22, 2000, p. 39

<sup>57</sup> ICG, September 2004, p. 16-17



Ahmad al-Najm, a member of the Saudi senior *ulama* committee; Sheikh Muqbil ibn Hadi al-Wadi'i, Salafi mufti in Yemen and Ja'far's teacher; Sheikh Rabi' bin Hadi al-Madkhali of Medina; Sheikh Salih al-Suhaimi, a *Salafi* mufti in Medina; Sheikh Wahid al-Jabiri, a *Salafi* mufti in Medina; and Sheikh Muhammad ibn Hadi al-Madkhali, a *Salafi* mufti in Medina.<sup>58</sup> The most important aspect of the *ulama*'s response, however, is the fact that their approval was conditional on a defensive *jihad*, intended to protect Muslims from the Christian attacks. None of the *Salafi ulama* approved an attack where the Laskar Jihad was the initiator. Moreover, some of them even laid down certain stipulations without which the *jihad* would not be lawful. Abd al-Muhsin al-Abbad, for example, said that the *jihad* should not endanger or hurt other Muslims, while Ahmad al-Najm and Salih al-Suhaimi required the availability of power and strength before waging the *jihad*.

By providing the *fatwa*, Ja'far argues that the *jihad* was religiously justified. However, it is clear the *fatwa* was not a starting point for Ja'far to declare the *jihad*. In other words, he did not seek the *fatwa* before he decided to declare the *jihad*, but in fact reversed the order. The *fatwas* themselves appeared after the mass rally in April 2000, because Sheikh Muhammad ibn Hadi al-Madkhali, for example, mentioned in his *fatwa* that Ja'far's group had taken the proper steps, including *tabligh akbar* and meeting with President Abdulrahman Wahid, before waging the *jihad*.<sup>59</sup>

The appearance of the *fatwa* after the establishment of the Laskar Jihad provides grounds for arguing that Ja'far's insistence on waging *jihad* in Maluku was motivated more by his experience in Afghanistan than his status as a *Salafi* follower. He was as deeply distressed and angered by what had happened to Muslims in Maluku as he had been about the situation in Afghanistan. He had already made his decision before the *fatwa* was issued. However, since he is a member of the *Salafi* network, he needed endorsement from the highest rank of *Salafi* scholars and his past history suggests that he would not have crossed the "border" without this endorsement. Had the *Salafi ulama* not issued the *fatwa* supporting the *jihad*, Ja'far would have abrogated it.

Although *jihad* was one of the most important principles of the Laskar Jihad, it was never meant as an aggressive war. The Laskar limited *jihad* to defensive action to protect Muslims from Christian attacks. In addition, *jihad* does not mean instigating rebellion against the legitimate government, and Ja'far accepted this. Furthermore, he claimed that the *jihad* was waged against those who wanted to establish a separate government, i.e. the Republic of South Maluku (RMS).<sup>60</sup> He also argued that the decision to publicly recruit the members was meant to "straighten" the negative perception of *jihad*. *Jihad*, according to Ja'far,

<sup>58</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics," p. 166

<sup>59</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics," p. 166.

<sup>60</sup> Ja'far Umar Thalib, *Laskar Jihad Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah* (n.p.: DPP FKAWJ, 2001), p. 17. The Republic of South Maluku was declared on April 25, 1950, by Dr. Soumokil. Although by November this movement was fully crushed by the Indonesian troops, sympathizers of this movement still exist, either in Maluku or in the Netherlands. See Ricklefs, *A History*, p. 285.

was previously perceived negatively as a rebellion or a movement against the government.<sup>61</sup> At this time he wanted to show that *jihad* also has a positive meaning.

The Laskar Jihad did implement the principle of *jihad*. After recruiting members, the Laskar Jihad conducted military training in several cities. *Gatra* magazine, for example, reported in March 2000 that the training was taking place in Surabaya, Malang, Madiun, Jombang, Gresik (all in East Java), as well as in Solo, Central Java.<sup>62</sup> Then, after the April mass rally in Jakarta, the Laskar Jihad conducted what it called the Consolidated National Training (*Latihan Gabungan Nasional*), in Bogor, the southern part of Jakarta, on 7-17 of April 2000. This was followed by the deployment of as many as 3000 people in Maluku by the end of April and mid May 2000.

The government opposed the Laskar Jihad's activities. After meeting with the representatives of the Laskar Jihad, President Abdurrahman Wahid ordered the police and the military to prevent its members from going to Maluku. However, due to internal friction within the government, President Wahid's instructions were ineffective.<sup>63</sup> Laskar Jihad units freely went to Maluku and faced no restrictions on their way. This resulted in an assumption that the Laskar Jihad was supported by or received assistance from the military or police institutions.<sup>64</sup> Had the military or police chiefs supported the President, they would have had easily stopped the Laskar Jihad from leaving for Maluku.

The implementation of *jihad* shows one aspect of the radicalism of the Laskar Jihad. Members of the Laskar believe that *jihad* is a religiously ordained action. They implemented this principle with full consciousness of the effects and risks of *jihad*, including the possibility of being wounded or dying in the battle field. *Jihad* for them is a physical war and not just a spiritual exercise, as it is perceived by most Indonesian Muslims. Members of the Laskar Jihad tried to change this view by involving themselves in the conflict in Maluku. Ja'far argues that physical *jihad* is a part of the *da'wah*.

The next principle in Laskar Jihad beliefs is the implementation of *shari'ah* (Islamic laws) in daily life. However, following *Salafi* views, this principle does not mean that they intend to establish an Islamic state. According to Ja'far, Indonesia is already an Islamic state because Muslims are free to practice Islamic teachings and the government also regulates Islamic affairs. This view is consistent with Ja'far's idea that there are only two types of state: Islamic (*dar al-Islam*) or infidel (*dar al-harb*) states. If Muslims live in an infidel state,

<sup>61</sup> Ja'far Umar Thalib, p. 17

<sup>62</sup> *Gatra*, March 25, 2002, p. 66-68

<sup>63</sup> President Wahid was supported by an alliance of several parties when he was elected as the President. However, after becoming president, he initiated several policies without consulting with the parties, and, moreover, disappointed them. One of the most disappointing policies was the replacement of members of the cabinet.

<sup>64</sup> Ja'far rejected this rumors saying that Laskar Jihad did not get support from either military or police institutions. However, he acknowledged that some military men, as personals, assisted the Laskar as the military trainers. See *Gatra*, March 25, 2000, p. 69.

according to Ja'far, they have to move (*hijrah*) to an Islamic one. The opinion of this group is similar to that of the FPI but different from that of MMI and HT. The latter two made the establishment of an Islamic state, upon which the *Shari'ah* can be implemented, their ultimate objective.

The implementation of the *shari'ah*, for the Laskar Jihad, is to "Islamize" government policies or to insert Islamic values into Indonesian rules and laws which are currently being drafted. There are no reports, however, as to what extent the Laskar Jihad has endeavored to actually set this program in action, nor the degree to which their efforts have been successful. One case that scared many people was Ja'far's implementation of the *shari'ah* in the conflict area. A member of the Laskar Jihad who had pleaded guilty to raping a woman was stoned to death. Ja'far argues that the implementation of the *shari'ah* was caused by the absence of governing law during the conflict. There were "no prosecutors and no judges... The court was totally ineffective," Ja'far says.<sup>65</sup> That is why he took the decision to implement *shari'ah* in order to sentence the guilty man. However, this is the only case when the Laskar Jihad pushed implementation of the *shari'ah* during its time in Ambon.

The absence of the goal of establishing an Islamic state on the Laskar Jihad's agenda is based on *Salafi-Wahhabi* teachings. According to these teachings, a revolt against a Muslim government, though authoritarian, tyrannical or despotic, is unlawful. Ja'far once said to the mass media that his target was to topple Abdurrahman Wahid as the president,<sup>66</sup> but he never took any action to achieve this. Therefore, this statement probably reflects his disappointment after he met the President, and is not representative of his *Salafi* views. It might sound inconsistent that the group advocates the implementation of the *shari'ah*, on the one hand, but does not condone rebellion against a Muslim government, on the other. How can they implement *shari'ah* when they are not allowed to challenge the existing government? This is one major inconsistency in *Salafi* teachings.

Another inconsistency relates to the view of female leadership. According to the Laskar Jihad's views, Muslims are not allowed to elect a woman as the leader. But when President Abdurrahman Wahid was impeached by the parliament and Megawati replaced him as President, Ja'afar and his followers did not take any action to oppose her. Moreover, the dissolution of the Laskar Jihad happened during her presidency.

### VIII. The Dissolution of Laskar Jihad

The Laskar Jihad and the FKAWJ were dissolved, formally, on October 7, 2002. But this was not known by the public until October 16, 2002, a few days after the Bali bombings. According to Ja'far, the dissolution of the Laskar Jihad was the

<sup>65</sup> *Forum Keadilan*, p. 37

<sup>66</sup> *Panji Masyarakat*, April 26, 2000

decision of the legislative board of FKAWJ, which held a meeting in Yogyakarta October 3-7, 2002. The main reason for the dissolution, according to Ja'far, was a growing trend of involvement in political maneuverings among the members. A second reason was a *fatwa* from Sheikh Rabi'i ibn Hadi al-Madkhali, one of the seven *ulamas* who had previously endorsed the *jihad* in Maluku.<sup>67</sup> The dissolution was very abrupt and many people were taken by surprise, because when it happened, thousands of the *mujahidin* were still in Ambon. This resulted in an assumption that Ja'far's decision was due to the government's persuasion or suppression.

After the 9/11 attacks and the US government's launch of its war against terrorism, the Indonesian government was under pressure to join the anti-terrorism campaign as well as to take firm actions in cracking down on suspected Muslim fundamentalist groups. Ja'far himself was reported by several mass media as having connections with Osama bin Laden; and the Laskar Jihad was suspected of providing a niche for al-Qaeda in Indonesia.<sup>68</sup> Although the government insisted that there was no proof of al-Qaeda's operation in Indonesia, Ja'far was detained on May 4, 2002. He was charged with having insulted the president and with provoking a religious conflict. But after several days in jail, Ja'far was released and on January 30, 2003, the court decided that he was not guilty. In analyzing possible connections between the detainment, the release, the dissolution of the Laskar Jihad and FKAWJ, and the court's verdict that Ja'far was not guilty, some argue that there was a deal between the government and Ja'far. In other words, Ja'far would be released if he dissolved the Laskar Jihad.<sup>69</sup>

Although this may have been the case, the evidence suggests that the dissolution of the group was based more on *Salafi* principles, as Ja'far argued, than on pressure from the government. After Ja'far became popular as the commander of the Laskar Jihad, he was invited to several religious gatherings where he met and socialized with non-*Salafi* Muslims. In addition, he was also often interviewed by mass media, so that his face frequently appeared on television as well as in printed newspapers and magazines. Ja'far's growing personal popularity was not acceptable to *Salafi* members. Umar Sewed, Ja'far's close ally in the early 1990s, for example, criticized all Ja'far's activities. Qumar Suaidi, another member of the *Salafi* network, wrote that "Ja'far Umar Thalib Has Left Us," meaning that he had deviated from *Salafi* principles. Disappointed with an apparent change in Ja'far's actions, the *Salafi* people relayed their views to Sheikh Rabi' ibn Hadi al-Madkhali. Al-Madkhali responded to the report in a long statement recorded on cassette, expressing regret for Ja'far's behavior and for recent developments in relation to the *jihad*. "If you continue, it means you

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<sup>67</sup> *Kompas*, October 17, 2002.

<sup>68</sup> See for example the report of Raymond Bonner and Jane Perlez, "Qaeda Mobbing into Indonesia, Official Fear," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2002 and Andrew Marshall, "The Threat of Jaffar," *The New York Times Magazine*, March 10, 2002.

<sup>69</sup> See *Gatra*, October 26, 2002, p. 74-76, *Tempo*, October 27, 2002, and *Kompas*, October 17, 2002.

have joined the Brotherhood... and the real *Salafis* will shun you,” said Al-Madkhali.<sup>70</sup>

After receiving this cassette, Ja’far and the committee members of the FKAWJ and Laskar Jihad met in early October 2002 and discussed the future of the group. Ja’far insisted on dissolving the Laskar Jihad as well as FKAWJ. If there had been no *fatwa* from Al-Madkhali, it is very likely that Ja’far would have continued his *jihad*, though there might have been repression from the government. As noted earlier, when he started the *jihad*, he continued deploying members of the Laskar Jihad, even though the President prohibited it.

## IX. Conclusion

Radical Muslims clearly do exist in Indonesia. As discussed earlier, this radicalism is partly due to the availability of references in the Qur’an. Historical, social and political conditions in Indonesia also have contributed to the emergence of radical movements. Although they share some ideals, such as implementation of the *shari’ah*, each of them operates independently because each has its own characteristics. They even criticize each other. It seems, therefore, almost impossible that all radical groups in Indonesia will unite under one leadership. In other words, without strong leadership, Muslim radicals will always be “splinter groups” and will be unlikely to receive major support from majority of Indonesian Muslims.

As far as Ja’far Umar Thalib and his Laskar Jihad are concerned, the cumulative evidence shows that they are not as dangerous as portrayed by Marshall in the *New York Times*. Although Ja’far successfully recruited thousands of Muslims to be *mujahid* in Maluku, he maintained his view that the *jihad* is for defensive purposes. He also had no agenda to establish an Islamic state. His views in this regard are totally different from those of Abu Bakar Ba’asyir and also opposed to the views of the Hizbut Tahrir. Ja’far easily dissolved the Laskar Jihad under the “guidance” of the *Salafi-Wahhabi* scholars in Saudi Arabia while the *Salafi-Wahhabi ulama* in Mecca and Medina themselves are part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This means that as long as the government of Saudi Arabia keeps the *ulama* in control, *Salafi* Muslims in Indonesia, such as Ja’far Umar Thalib, are unlikely to impose a real threat toward the nation-state of Indonesia.

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted from ICG, September 2004, p. 18. The Brotherhood here means the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*), an organization based in Egypt and founded for the first time by Hasan al-Banna. Sayyid Qutb was the ideologue of the group. See, Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

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## Glossary

<i>alim</i> , pl. <i>ulama</i>	Muslim scholar, scholars
<i>aliran kebatinan</i>	local beliefs
<i>amar ma'ruf nahi munkar</i>	to command righteousness and to prevent evilness
<i>amir</i>	leader
<i>Bank Mu'amalat Indonesia</i>	Indonesian Islamic Bank
<i>bid'ah</i>	innovation
<i>dar al-harb</i>	infidel state
<i>Darul Islam</i>	(DI) Islamic State
<i>da'wah</i>	call, proselytizing
<i>dawlah</i>	state
<i>al-din wa al-dawlah</i>	religion and state
<i>Forum Komunikasi Ahlusunah wal Jama'ah</i>	(FKAWJ) Communication Forum of Sunni
<i>Front Pembela Islam</i>	Front of Defenders of Islam
<i>Hadith</i>	sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad
<i>Hizbut Tahrir</i>	Liberation Party
<i>ijtihad</i>	independent reasoning
<i>Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia</i>	(ICMI) Indonesian Union of Muslim Intellectuals
<i>Jami'at al-Khair</i>	Association of Goodness
<i>Jam'iyyat al-Islah wa al-Irshad</i>	Union for Reformation and Guidance
<i>jihād</i>	religious war
<i>Khalifah</i>	Caliph
<i>khilafah</i>	caliphate
<i>khurafat</i>	superstition



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<i>Laskar Jihad</i>	paramilitary fighters
<i>Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab</i>	(LIPIA) Institute for Islamic Knowledge and Arabic
<i>Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia</i>	Council of Indonesian Jihad Fighters
<i>mujahid, pl. mujahidin</i>	warrior, warriors
<i>Negara Islam Indonesia</i>	(NII) Indonesian Islamic State
<i>Pancasila</i>	national ideology of Indonesia
<i>Partai Demokrasi Indonesia</i>	Indonesian Democracy Party
<i>Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan</i>	Reformed Indonesian Democracy Party
<i>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan</i>	United Development Party
<i>Persatuan Islam</i>	Union of Islam
<i>Pesantren</i>	Islamic boarding school
<i>posko</i>	center of command or communication
<i>Ramadhan</i>	Islamic fasting month
<i>Reformasi</i>	reform
<i>Ruh</i>	spirit
<i>Sahabat</i>	companions of the Prophet
<i>Salaf</i>	first generation of Muslims
<i>Shari'ah</i>	Islamic laws
<i>shirk</i>	associationism
<i>tabligh akbar</i>	religious mass rally
<i>taqlid</i>	blindly following the opinion of former scholars
<i>tawhid</i>	absolute monotheism
<i>ukhuwah Islamiyah</i>	Islamic brotherhood
<i>usrah</i>	small group

*Wahhabi*

Islamic sect following Muhammad  
ibn Abd al-Wahhab