Excerpts from:

Preventing Violent Radicalization and Terrorism

The Case of Indonesia

by Magnus Ranstorp

CATS
Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies

Preface (from page v of the report)

This document – written by Dr. Magnus Ranstorp, Research Director at CATS – addresses the effects and relevance of measures to counteract radicalization and terrorism. The document presents the conclusions from a previous project that our Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies undertook and submitted to Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) in 2009 involving an in-depth case study of Indonesia which was carried out in the southeast Asian region.

The underlying idea of this study was, from an overall point of view, to describe and analyze the various efforts undertaken to marginalize extremist elements within Indonesia with relevant differences and similarities from European experiences as a reference point. Indonesia was chosen since the country has frequently been described as a major success story. As one of the largest Muslim countries in the world, Indonesia has successfully stemmed widespread development of violent radicalization as well as marginalized Jemmah Islamiyyah, an indigenous terrorist movement with regional and transnational tentacles. However, very little has been written on the relatively systematic efforts on the part of the Indonesian government and various societal actors towards these ends. Issues that the study attempts to elucidate include: How did they successfully marginalize these extremist forces? Which means and methods have been used? Are there any lessons that can be applied to other countries where Sida is active?

This document only addresses the conclusions of the abovementioned project. It presents a spectrum of ideas for different methods that can be used to prevent radicalization with regards to religious extremism and generic countermeasures. On the whole, these may be applicable to several operational and programme areas of development cooperation aimed at preventing this type of development.

Lars Nicander

Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies, CATS
Stockholm, October 2009

1. Introduction

1.1 Background (from page 1)

Generic understanding of conditions conducive for terrorism and various means and methods that can be used to prevent these conditions are of great importance in terms of developing policy aimed at promoting peace and security. The OECD-DAC's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee) guidelines *Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* and *A Development Co-operation Lens on Terrorism Prevention: Key Entry Points for Action* offer points of departure for using development cooperation as an instrument to counteract terrorism. Analytical and method support are important in terms of investigating, potentially developing and determining to what extent, within the framework of aid targets, development cooperation can serve as an instrument to reinforce a country's indigenous ability to counteract terrorism.

For a number of years, the Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS) at the Swedish National Defence College has performed advanced analytical work and government-funded research on countering various forms of terrorism. The research is primarily focused on ascertaining

functioning tools and the best practices for settings where ideological (in the form of 'violent radicalization'), religious and cultural factors exist individually or together.

2. Conclusions and Relevance for Development Cooperation and Recommendations for Sida´s Work

2.1 Analysis of Methods to Combat Radicalization (from pages 5-6)

A central element of the Indonesian model involves working through networks of individuals who have religious credibility, are well established and greatly respected within the various groups that have far-reaching impact on the society. The largest religious organizations in Indonesia have a popular character and thus constitute important channels for actors promoting counter-measures. The LibForAll Foundation (LibForAll) is a particularly interesting non-governmental actor that is able to create networks and promote effective messages and initiatives in various constellations.

A relatively original way of reaching young people involves identifying popular artists who then communicate crafted messages aimed at counteracting radical currents. Music productions with lyrics about tolerance as a countermeasure to radicalism, violence and terrorism have quickly become popular all over Southeast Asia (with best-selling albums topping the charts on MTV Asia).

2.2 Strategic Level (from page 8)

The key to success on a strategic level – according to LibForAll's founder Charles Holland Taylor – involves mobilizing Muslim public opinion on all social levels to unite behind the message that extremists are ideological 'emperors without clothes.' Calling attention to the fact that extremist interpretations of Islam lack a theological basis is a prerequisite in terms of mobilizing the quiet majority of Muslims to reject extremism and to marginalize extremists.

This is not a matter of merely taking the position of watchman over moderate forces where subversive political agendas, infiltration attempts into moderate Muslim organizations/institutions or external financing to extremists are exposed. Success is primarily based on actual organizational capacity in terms of forming horizontal and vertical networks of moderate forces. This is also combined with the ability to find new and innovative ways of communicating the 'countermessage'. A combination of a credible and effective message on the one hand and the 'right' messenger on the other makes this happen.

2.2.2 Popular Culture as an Effective Tool (from pages 11-13)

LibForAll has been exceptional in a regional context for issues involving innovative forms and communicating the message of anti-extremism. One guiding star in these efforts has been selecting methods with maximum impact and that reach the largest possible audience. Thus, it was natural to promote the Indonesian pop star Ahmed Dani and the song *Lashkar Cinta* ('love soldiers'). Doing so created chasms within and a reaction from extremist forces, which could then subsequently be marginalized after they had been enticed to react and reveal themselves. LibForAll says that 6-7 million copies of the album were sold, and that the concerts were covered by the national media. Over 90 concerts were held, and over 10,000 people attended each one. Furthermore, three songs with anti-extremist messages reached the top of the radio charts and were aired on MTV Asia, which generated months of publicity for the anti-extremist message….

Both the LibForAll and Yeh Hum Naheen projects, which aim to independently disseminate and internationalize their Muslim and cultural movements across language and cultural barriers, are worth

supporting *indirectly*. The credibility of these projects is largely based on the initiative of entrepreneurs on local levels; these should be stimulated and supported in different ways.

Even if the ambition is to create a global Muslim cultural movement that propagates religious tolerance and that is the direct opposite of extremism, the projects' generic basic principles and focus can be applied and inspired on a more local level in other contexts that struggle with the same problems. One prioritized aspect might be to examine which cultural forms are the most effective in local contexts such as Bangladesh, Somalia or Kenya. Are there any positive cultural forces in these countries that can help build a broad and credible network and that can reinforce a nation as well as mobilize positive counterbalances to extremism? A survey of potential 'gap bridgers' and cultural personalities and a careful analysis of effective forms and means would constitute the first step towards a more sustained and massive initiative.

LibForAll has also achieved success through Lautan Wahu "Ocean of Revelation" – a widespread TV campaign that consists of 26 video episodes that discredit extremist arguments. References are made to scholarly and respected imams who have preferential right of interpretation within Islam.

The first six episodes are primarily based on the Indonesian perspective but contain the appearance of the Grand Mufti from the Egyptian Al-Azhar Mosque and University which is opposed to extremism and terrorism in the name of *jihad*. Even if focus is on an Indonesian audience, LibForAll aims to produce an additional 20 episodes based on other legitimate voices from across the globe that stand united against extremism. The planned episodes will be filmed in Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany with the aim of creating positive voices on the topic of Islam and Muslims.

One important aspect of the LibForAll video project is how the balance between active Indonesian religious figures and credible voices in the Arab world can be reinforced; this will help bridge the gap between Indonesia and the rest of the Muslim world. How can the most influential imams in the Arab world be persuaded to stand behind the project? Creating a video series that is perceived as relevant outside Indonesia as well requires a great deal more work. One aspect that can be called into question is why the LibForAll video production is not primarily focused on Southeast Asia where it can be possibly most effective.

This type of TV campaign is far from new in the battle against extremism. Even if it has primarily dealt with the repressive aspects related to combating terrorism where TV confessions outline the mistakes terrorists have made and how they have been manipulated to commit acts of violence (as exemplified by the classic Egyptian approach), LibForAll's campaign has a decidedly positive focus. There is scope for examining how the message can be communicated most effectively in terms of reaching young people via innovative pop culture. Besides pop artists, comics have been used to reach out to young people with anti-extremist messages.

2.2.3 Exposing the Extent of Extremism and Its 'True Colours' (from pages 14-15)

LibForAll's publication of *The Illusion of an Islamic State: The Expansion of Transnational Islamist Movements to Indonesia* had a considerable impact on domestic policy. It primarily contributed to neutralizing one candidate's bid for vice president in the 2009 national election campaign, who had ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. It also helped drive a wedge between President Susilo Yudhoyono, who was running for re-election, and the PKS party's candidate, which had been his coalition partner for the previous five years. PKS has played a double role – it has supported the government the past five years on the one hand and continued to promote radicalization on the other. Yudhoyono nominated a strong nationalist candidate as vice president instead.

According to Charles Holland Taylor, LibForAll's founder, the PKS party was put on a defensive and reactive path for the first time in ten years. PKS often negotiates on various minister portfolios, with a particular focus on the Department of Education as it can spread its influence on the local levels most effectively. PKS was apparently so surprised by and unprepared for the antiextremist campaign that it only defended itself by stating that the controversial book was funded by George W. Bush as one of his final political decisions.

Publication of the controversial book was a calculated risk that managed to marginalize extremist political forces. Translation of the book received support from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Not only did it create breathing space, it also created the necessary prerequisites for follow-up initiatives such as debates and other networks to further counterbalance extremism.

On 16 May 2009, for example, the Bhinneka Tunggal Ika ('*Oneness in Diversity*') movement was created by Wahid (the former president), Syafii Maarif (the former chairman of Muhammadiyah), Kyai Haji Mustofa Bisri (a leading Nahdlatul Ulama leader) and Charles Holland Taylor. The aim of the initiative was to organize leading members of the Indonesian elite and society as a whole to actively prevent the spread of radical Islam on all levels and with all available means.

There were also reports of an extensive SMS text message campaign before the national elections being sent to the general public that claimed that the former PKS president Hidayat Nur Wahid was a Wahabi follower; it also discredited a government coalition with PKS. This led *de facto* to political distrust and PKS being prevented from influencing the minister portfolio. [Note: although politically damaged by LibForAll's campaign, the PKS managed to preserve its relationship with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and acquire ministerial posts in his second administration.]

Despite LibForAll's success, the organisation has been criticized for its polarized rhetoric on Islam since it uses provocation strategies to divide Muslims (and Muslim countries) into 'good' and 'ill-intentioned' Muslims instead of offering a modulated view on the different trends within Islam. However, the most recent political successes indicate that provocation is effective in terms of marginalizing PKS.

Indonesia is certainly unique with its coalitions of various strategic players that simultaneously act individually and collectively on different levels against extremism. However, the model of exposing and attempting to marginalize extremist forces additionally through widespread publication initiatives is an interesting tool to study and possibly support for other types of social tensions. In general, the model is based on forcing reactions that are then actively addressed on many different fronts in a structured, controlled and pre-determined manner.

2.2.4 Creating 'Positive' Counterbalances to Extremism (from pages 15-16)

LibForAll has also utilized Rahmatan lil Alamin's network that allows the scope of the programme to extend beyond Indonesia's borders. For example, LibForAll organized a religious summit on Bali. Participants condemned the forces that deny the existence of the Jewish holocaust and emphasized 'religious tolerance as a blessing for all beings' in conjunction with Iranian President Ahmadinejad's holocaust conference in Teheran in February 2007. The conference was organized together with the Simon Wiesenthal Center as a means of emphasizing tolerance between religions.

LibforAll's demonstration of strength involves creating a cross-sector network that is based on a five-level integration of the following: religious leaders (*ulama*) who have garnered widespread public support and who can address radical backlash; religious scholars and teachers who can garner the requisite intellectual and theological support for a pluralistic and tolerant interpretation of Islam; pop idols who have massive support from young people; government leaders who are able to address

social factors as an underlying factor of extremism; as well as business leadership that can offer requisite financial support.

One expression of 'positive counterbalance' is the wealth of books and articles that aim to influence Muslim ideological circles. The guiding star of this work is large-scale distribution with the aim of reaching as many people as possible as exemplified by the Wahid Institute which distributes 500,000 newsletters on a grass roots level. The aim of the publications is to reinforce the theological interpretations that oppose violence motivated by faith and to reinforce arguments for separation of religion and state since mixing them undermines Islam and its fundamental values.

Initiatives aim to create a cultural, intellectual and theological mustering of strength that supports a pluralistic and tolerant interpretation of Islam. Identification, mobilization and support of the appropriate public opinion leaders in the Muslim society are decisive to these efforts.

2.2.5 Promoting Democracy (from page 16)

One decisive initiative was Muhammidiyah's decision to issue a ban on outside influence or activities that were in conflict with the organization's principles according to its charter and against the spirit of democracy. Nahdlatul Ulama has also issued an official decree stating that Muslims are not theologically required to establish a khalifa or oppose democracy. Warnings pertaining to imported ideology and activities that are contrary to the government ideology of *pancasila* have also been issued.

2.2.6 Promoting 'Mainstream' Religious Education (from page 17)

LibForAll has also established the Institute of Qur'anic Studies, which has its seat in Leiden. The aim is to create a renaissance within Islam with impetus towards pluralism, tolerance and critical thinking and to develop democracy and safeguard universal human rights.

2.2.7 Capacity-Building Initiatives for Muslim Movements and Activists on a Grass Roots Level (from page 17)

Even if LibForAll's strategy involves working from a top-down perspective, other institutes also contribute by focusing on the grass roots level. The different focuses complement one another. The work is in part focused on denying extremists opportunity, and in part on reinforcing local communities on a social level by combating poverty.

3. Concluding Comments (from page 23)

Violent radicalization is a complex societal phenomenon. Broad approaches are needed both to prevent and counteract anti-democratic forces that propel extremism and violence forward. Addressing these forces from a strategic perspective often demands the presence of forceful leadership and enthusiasts within the various public authorities. At the same time, strong individuals within civic communities are needed who carry on creative and constructive dialogs via non-profit associations and who also, from time to time, coordinate various initiatives and measures on national and local levels.

The development of extremism in Indonesia has been successfully stemmed by cultural factors (*pancasila*) and a strategically coordinated initiative, primarily promoted by LibForAll, including goal-oriented activities on tactical and strategic levels. The main achievement has involved mobilizing counterforces to extremism by creating a robust defence of the principle of separation of state and religion in Indonesia. The Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (*Oneness Amid Diversity*) movement has also been established; this movement actively works to defend the *pancasila* government ideology and the 1945

constitution. One of the most distinguishing conclusions from this study involves the decisive importance of popular movements, which can serve as a counterforce to extremism by coordinating various initiatives on national, regional and local levels. Even if the possibilities for exporting the Indonesian model are limited and linked to context, our study shows that it is possible to identify different useful and generic tools and approaches to prevent and address different kinds of extremism.

Indonesia stands out as a global leader in the ideological struggle against violent radicalization and extremism. Unfortunately, many Indonesian attempts to link its own successful experiences to the Middle East have been overshadowed and received a relatively chilly reception in the region. LibForAll constitutes, however, an interesting phenomenon in terms of bridging the gap against extremism both within and between regions. The organization has also, in an experimental manner, used various means and forums to reach out to as large a segment of society as possible by using credible messengers and new technological platforms. The study primarily shows that LibForAll's coordinated media strategy has had a decisive political effect in terms of curbing political parties with an extremist agenda. Exposing the true nature of the parties has enabled marginalization of corrosive, subversive forces.

Finally, different Indonesian tools and lessons can probably be applied to areas of Southeast Asia where extremism appears to be on the rise: primarily in Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as outside the region in areas such as Bangladesh. The Indonesian approach of preventing and addressing extremism can potentially be used in other regions as well. One example might be parts of Africa where Islam does not have the same historical roots as in other regions and where extremism is often an exogenous phenomenon.

Newsweek

"The Jihad Against the Jihadis," by Fareed Zakaria, cites the CATS study and, without naming LibForAll, refers to its decisive role in helping to counter radicalization: "Perhaps the most successful country to combat jihadism has been the world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia. In 2002 that country seemed destined for a long and painful struggle with the forces of radical Islam. The nation was rocked by terror attacks, and a local Qaeda affiliate, Jemaah Islamiah, appeared to be gaining strength. But eight years later, JI has been marginalized and main-stream political parties have gained ground, all while a young democracy has flowered after the collapse of the Suharto dictatorship.

"Magnus Ranstorp of Stockholm's Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies recently published a careful study examining Indonesia's success in beating back extremism. The main lesson, he writes, is to involve not just government but civil society as a whole, including media and cultural figures who can act as counterforces to terrorism."