



Islamic ideology is ‘more dangerous than terrorism’

Endy M. Bayuni, The Jakarta Post, Washington, DC | Mon, 05/16/2011 10:51 PM | World

Amidst the euphoria over the killing of Osama bin Laden by the United States, a new book on Islam in Indonesia is cautioning Washington that an ideology that preaches hatred and violence is much more dangerous than the terrorist acts that Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network posed.

The Illusion of an Islamic State however makes it clear that Islam itself is “a blessing for all creation” (rahmatan lil-alamin) and that people in the West, as many Indonesians do, must make a clear distinction between Islam as a religion, which preaches peace and tolerance, and Islam as a political ideology, which preaches hatred and intolerance.

The book’s original Indonesian version was launched in 2009 as a common response from moderate Islamic groups to the growing threat of radicalism that comes from the use of Islam as a political ideology.

The work is a collaboration of scholars linked to the Wahid and the Maarif institutes, Indonesian organizations known for preaching tolerance and pluralism, and the US-based LibforAll Foundation, which was co-founded by the late former Indonesian president Abdurrahman “Gus Dur” Wahid and C. Holland Taylor.

The English translation of the book was recently launched in Washington and Brussels with seminars featuring Taylor and respected Indonesian Muslim scholar Mustofa Bisri from Nahdlatul Ulama.

The Washington launch at the Heritage Foundation was timely, as the US is struggling to find an appropriate policy for the Arab world in the wake of the Arab Spring and the killing of Bin Laden.

In Brussels, the launch was facilitated by the European Parliament and the Indonesian Embassy in Belgium.

“There is a tendency for Western governments to focus on terrorism. We believe that ideology is much more dangerous than bombs,” Taylor said in an interview prior to the launch.

He urged the West to look at moderate Islamic forces in Indonesia that not only have beaten back the extremist ideology associated with the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahabism, but were also able to reconcile Islam with values normally associated with modernity.

“The book contains a theological rejection of the politicized agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahabism, and it points a path through which Muslims in other parts of the world can adapt the benefits of the rule of law, civil liberty and modern society, while retaining their Islamic identity and adapting their understanding of Islam to live in a modern world, human rights, freedom and democracy,” he said.

Although the book looks at the battle among Muslims in Indonesia, Taylor says the West as well as the rest of the world could learn by turning to the teachings of Bisri and Gus Dur in dealing with the viral global threat of Islamic ideology.

“Fortunately there are prominent Muslim leaders with tremendous legitimacy, authority and courage who pointed the way, with this book, how to understand the threat of the ideology, and how to systematically counter it,” he said.

The Indonesian launch of the book sparked outrage particularly, from Hizbut Tahir Indonesia and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which were singled out by Gus Dur in his preface as the “enemies within the blanket”.

The English version of *Illusion* adds an entire chapter that reflects the controversy with statements from those who attacked and praised the book.

Noting that the Indonesian edition deprived Islamist political parties of a larger share of the vote in the 2009 elections, Taylor cautioned against complacency, given the international nature of the networks of those campaigning for Islamist political ideology and the large financial backing they enjoy.

“The nature of the extremists is that they keep on coming, keep on coming and keep on coming. The only way to stop this is to ultimately isolate, marginalize and discredit the ideology itself and the extremist movements through sustained long term campaign. It is not to be executed merely in one country, or one region, in the world, but globally,” he said.

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