

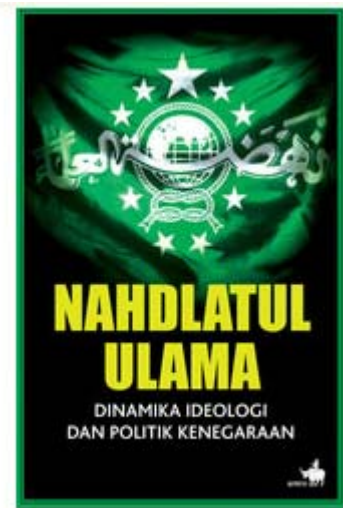
DEMOCRACY DIGEST

October 11, 2012

Indonesia's civil Islam under threat?

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and resurgence of Wahhabi/Salafi groups in the wake of the Arab awakening highlights the urgent need for “a renaissance of Islamic pluralism, tolerance and critical thinking,” according to two leading commentators.

“What we are facing today is even more dangerous than [physical acts of terrorism](#): that is, the onslaught of extremist ideology, which is provoking a visceral backlash in the West, in an ever-escalating cycle of hatred and violence,” say [Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri](#), deputy chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia’s mass Islamic movement, and [Holland Taylor](#), the head of [LibForAll](#) and its [International Institute of Qur’anic Studies](#).



With 50 million adherents and some 14,000 madrasahs, the NU is the world’s largest Muslim organization.

Indonesia has been held up as a potential model for Arab transitional states for demonstrating the [compatibility of Islam and democracy](#), and the pluralist potential of its [distinctive form of civil Islam](#).

Widely considered a [democratic beacon in a volatile region](#), Indonesia’s reform process was characterized by a “remarkable opening-up of political space [and] regeneration of civil society.” Its transition reportedly has a [particular resonance for U.S. President Barack Obama](#), who lived there as a child and has [lauded its shift from authoritarian rule](#).

But that promise is under threat, Bisri and Taylor warn in the latest issue of Strategic Review, providing what former Indonesian foreign minister Hassan Wirajuda calls “a

peek at a bold forthcoming action plan to help the West isolate both extremist Islamist groups and Islamophobes.”

It is a sad commentary on Indonesia’s state of moral and cultural decay – and a damning indictment of its leadership – that our population at large should retain a greater appreciation of and commitment to the values and traditions of their ancestors, than do many of our governing elites. Opportunistic politicians and political parties continue to [empower a small minority of extremists](#) who are bent upon disrupting the social and political harmony of our nation and undermining the very pillars upon which our national unity is built, in pursuit of their [illusory ideal of an Islamic state](#).

As a consequence, a nation once renowned for religious pluralism and tolerance is now better known for savage attacks upon its Christian, Ahmadiyah and Shiite minorities, while government officials stand idly by or even persecute the victims of such attacks. Political parties ally themselves with religious extremists, while striving to neutralize moderate mass organizations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, to prevent their functioning as voices of moral authority that will hold the government accountable for its egregious acts and omissions. Complicit in this abdication of moral responsibility, all too many religious figures cultivate the appearance of virtue while determinedly pursuing their own egocentric agendas, and thus cooperate with self-serving politicians in the dissipation and debasement of our sublime heritage and the institution of religion itself.

[Read The Whole Thing](#)

With the backing of prominent Muslim leaders and groups in South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America, LibForAll’s [International Institute of Qur’anic Studies](#) aims to nurture “schools of Qur’anic interpretation that combine the best of classical exegetical methodologies with those of modern scholarship, and to ground this scholarship in a profoundly spiritual understanding and experience of Islam that is capable of deepening and broadening, rather than destroying, Muslims’ faith.”

“In doing so, it seeks to establish a lasting foundation for a [renaissance of Islamic pluralism](#), tolerance and critical thinking, and foster the necessary conditions for the development of just societies and the protection of universal human rights throughout the Muslim world.”

<http://www.demdigest.net/blog/2012/10/indonesias-civil-islam-under-threat/>