



Editor:  
H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid

# THE ILLUSION OF AN ISLAMIC STATE

Prologue & Preface:  
Prof. Dr. Ahmad Syafii Maarif  
C. Holland Taylor

Epilogue:  
KH. A. Mustofa Bisri

*Preface to the English Edition*

FIGHTING FIRE WITH WATER

*By C. Holland Taylor*

*The Illusion of an Islamic State* represents a landmark achievement in the field of counter-radicalization, which demonstrates how an alliance of moderate Muslim leaders can effectively isolate, and discredit, the ideology of religious hatred, supremacy and violence that underlies and animates terrorism. As such, it warrants serious study—as well as the wide dissemination, and application, of its findings—by public policy makers, journalists and people of good will of every faith and nation, who care about the threat to humanity posed by Islamist ideology, terrorism and a rising tide of Islamophobia in the West.

If the Muslim world, including the contemporary Middle East, is to navigate a path between the Scylla and Charybdis of temporal and religious authoritarianism—and, at long last, provide its inhabitants with the kinds of civil liberty, and rule of law, that people in the West have come to take for granted—it can only do so by applying the principles articulated in this visionary work. For the renowned Muslim theologians who authored *The Illusion of an Islamic State* have issued a stirring *theological* defense of freedom, grounded in a profoundly spiritual understanding of Islam that is capable of deepening and broadening, rather than destroying, Muslims' faith. As such, it represents a unique contribution from Indonesia to the world, offered in the spirit of love, compassion and respect.

For Muslim societies in the midst of intense political transformation, this book offers a model for dealing responsibly with the threat of both violent and non-violent extremists, including the

Muslim Brotherhood, by using democratic methods rather than those of a brutal police state. In Europe and North America, *The Illusion of an Islamic State* may help to illuminate the increasingly polarized and strident debate on Islam that has paralyzed Western societies, and led to institutional deadlock in the face of a profound threat that jeopardizes the prospects of a peaceful and harmonious future for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

An immediate publishing phenomenon upon its “hard launch” in May of 2009 in Indonesia—the country with the world’s largest Muslim population and democracy—*The Illusion of an Islamic State* exposed extremist ideology to public ridicule and rejection, and decisively influenced the outcome of Indonesia’s national elections that year.

Active participation by the most respected Muslim leaders in Indonesia was crucial to the project’s success. Former president Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid (1940 – 2009)—whom Bret Stephens of the *Wall Street Journal* once called “the single most influential religious leader in the Muslim world,” and “easily the most important ally the West has in the ideological struggle against Islamic radicalism”—served as the book’s editor. In this capacity, he wrote an extensive introduction (“The Enemy Within”) that served both as an executive summary of the report, and a dramatic appeal for Indonesians “to restore honor and respect to Islam, which the extremists have desecrated,” and to “restore the majesty of Islamic teachings as *rahmatan lil-‘alamîn*—a blessing for all creation—[which] represents a vital key to building a peaceful world.”

*The Illusion of an Islamic State* also includes contributions by Kyai Haji Mustofa Bisri, a renowned leader of the world’s largest Muslim organization (the 40-million-member Nahdlatul Ulama, which President Wahid himself once led), and Dr. Syafii Maarif, the immediate past chairman of the 30-million-member Muhammadiyah organization, and 2008 recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award, Asia’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize. The fact that the book was co-published with two widely known and respected NGOs—The Wahid Institute and Maarif Institute—further strengthened the dramatic impact of its launch.

Western journalists quickly identified *The Illusion of an Islamic*

State as “a path-breaking new report” (*Wall Street Journal*) that exposed “Islamist groups... systematically infiltrating Indonesian mosques, institutes, universities and government, posing an even greater threat to the country than regional terrorist groups” (*International Herald Tribune*), “rais[ing] concerns that Indonesia’s moderate form of Islam and its secular ideology are under siege” (*Sydney Morning Herald*).

Yet except for Channel News Asia, which reported that “the [study’s] findings will certainly have some bearing on the country’s politics,” the international press generally overlooked a far more significant angle to the story, which was immediately evident to the Indonesian media and public alike. Backed by Abdurrahman Wahid, Syafii Maarif and Mustofa Bisri—the most prominent spiritual leaders associated with “the country’s two major Muslim organizations, the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama and the modernist Muhammadiyah... [which] together command the allegiance of 70 million people” (*Jakarta Globe*)—*The Illusion of an Islamic State* did not passively “report” on the phenomenon of Wahhabi/Muslim Brotherhood infiltration of Indonesian institutions.

Instead, as Indonesia’s largest web portal, with over 10 million visitors a day, was quick to proclaim following the book’s launch: “*The Illusion of an Islamic State* is the NU and Muhammadiyah’s Response to the [Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated] PKS and Hizb ut-Tahrir” (*Detik.com*). “Throwing a gauntlet down at the feet of radical Islam, a group of mainstream Muslim leaders led by former President Abdurrahman Wahid on Thursday announced the release of a book asserting that Indonesia is being infiltrated by foreign-funded extremists bent on turning the country into an Islamic state” (*Jakarta Globe*).

The Nahdlatul Ulama prominently featured the book on its website, as did the NU’s 10-million-member youth wing, Ansor. Within weeks of its launch, *The Illusion of an Islamic State* went from zero results on Google to over 556,000, and dramatically influenced Indonesia’s 2009 national elections: helping to prevent the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS) from merging its political platform with that of incumbent president (and 2009 winner) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY); de-

railing PKS ambitions to nominate its cadre as Yudhoyono’s vice presidential candidate, and thereby obtain the legitimacy required to secure the presidency in 2014; facilitating the nomination of Javanese nationalist Boediono as SBY’s vice president; and providing a robust theological justification and defense of Indonesia’s largely secular constitution, which rejects the notion of an “Islamic” state.

Unlike anything previously published on the subject of counter-radicalization—either in the Muslim world, or the West—*The Illusion of an Islamic State* seamlessly incorporated four distinct elements to achieve its unprecedented results:

- Field research, during which a team of 27 academicians from a network of Islamic State Universities and Institutes traveled to 24 districts in 17 provinces of Indonesia, and interviewed 591 extremist agents, in order to ascertain their ideology, agenda and affiliation with various transnational and domestic Islamist movements;
- Consultative research, in which the book’s editorial team met with dozens of top Muslim clerics, educators, political leaders, high ranking government officials, military officers, businessmen and media professionals, in order to obtain first-hand information regarding extremist infiltration of Indonesian society from moderate Muslim leaders who have direct, personal knowledge of these developments, and also to request said leaders’ advice regarding the issues covered by this book;
- Literature research, concerning the origins, ideology and spread of Islamist extremism in the Middle East and Indonesia, and the reaction of moderate Muslim organizations, such as the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, to this threat;
- Theological refutation of the ideology articulated, and generally shared, by the 591 extremist agents interviewed by the project’s field research team, and widely propagated not only in Indonesia, but among Muslim communities throughout the world, including Europe and North America. This theological refutation was written under

the direct supervision of Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid by his disciple, the Muslim theologian and *'alim* (scholar) Kyai Haji Hodri Ariev, who is LibForAll Foundation's Director of Programs for Southeast Asia, and head of Pondok Pesantren Bahrul Ulum ("Ocean of Knowledge Madrasa") in Jember, East Java.

Launched in September of 2006, the project required more than two and a half years to complete. The project team confronted numerous difficulties, ranging from the mundane to significant—including implicit and explicit threats of character assassination, and/or violence, directed towards those involved with the project. I recall discussing the latter with President Wahid, after informing him that a prominent Muslim figure involved with one phase of the project had suggested we not publish *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, "to avoid being attacked by extremists." President Wahid immediately replied, "Let them attack us! Then at least people will hear about the controversy, and can decide whether or not they agree with us. If we remain silent, only the extremists will be heard."

On another occasion, I informed President Wahid of the advice of a sympathetic but fearful Muslim leader, who knew of the book's imminent release, and asked that we not speak up (by publishing it). When asked his opinion, President Wahid laughed and replied loudly, "Holland, I made that decision forty years ago. Should we speak up? YES!!!!"

### **Historical Background**

President Wahid was referring to the brutal massacre of half a million to a million Indonesians in 1965/'66, in the wake of an abortive communist coup attempt. Because General Suharto's troops were insufficient in number to comb the Javanese countryside, his subordinates enlisted Muslim militias (including many members of the Nahdlatul Ulama, which Abdurrahman Wahid's grandfather had established in 1926) to help exterminate the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In 1965, PKI had been the third largest communist party in the world, its membership rolls exceeded only by those of China and the Soviet Union. By the end

of 1966, the PKI had been virtually annihilated.

Abdurrahman Wahid—whose father and paternal grandfather played key roles in Indonesia’s independence struggle, and establishing the new nation as a pluralistic and largely secular state—was twenty-five at the time, and enrolled at Egypt’s famed al-Azhar University in Cairo. During this period, he also worked part-time at the Indonesian embassy. There, the young Wahid was privy to diplomatic cables that described the bloody massacres underway back home, engendering a period of introspection that led to his fateful decision: never to remain silent in the face of injustice.

Upon his return to Indonesia, Wahid (popularly known as “Gus Dur”) became prominent in intellectual circles and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), assuming the role of general chairman of the mass-based Islamic organization in 1984. A lifelong devotee of freedom, Wahid promptly mobilized the NU to oppose President Suharto’s authoritarian regime, and lay the foundation for Indonesia’s eventual transition to democracy.

As one Indonesian activist told *Wall Street Journal* columnist Bret Stephens in April of 2007, “Gus Dur was the only person in Indonesia who, having dared to oppose Suharto at the height of his power, was never broken (by Suharto’s regime)... Anyone who could do that must be very, very *sakti* (possessed of immense spiritual power)... And one who is that *sakti* must be very close to being *wali allah* (i.e., a saint).”

The massacres of 1965/’66, which eviscerated the PKI, also had the unforeseen consequence of altering the balance of socio-religious forces within Indonesia. For hundreds of years, rural Javanese society in particular was divided between *santri* (observant) and *abangan* (non-observant) Muslims, the latter generally adhering to a syncretic, mystical set of beliefs referred to as *kejawen* (or “Javaneness”). Like Sufism (Islamic mysticism), *kejawen* maintains that Truth is universal, with many paths leading to the divine goal of human existence: i.e., union with God. Unlike Sufism, *kejawen* practitioners often disavow the need to observe Islamic law (or any other formal religious teaching/dogma) in order to attain to the Truth, which they maintain is synonymous with the inner state of enlightenment.

As President Wahid—the leader of Indonesia’s *santri* population—once said to me, “The reason Indonesian Islam is so tolerant is not because of *santris*. It’s because of *kejawen*, and the fact that *santris* have always had to live alongside the *kejawen*.”

The 1965/‘66 rural massacres—which specifically targeted *abangan* Javanese—disrupted the historic balance between Islam and *kejawen*. Although few *abangan* were familiar with the details of Marxist-Leninist ideology, or the geopolitical stakes involved in the struggle between capitalism and communism, the PKI had managed to build a mass movement by infiltrating *abangan* villages, and networking *abangan* communities throughout Central and East Java. Thus, destruction of the PKI resulted in the wholesale massacre of thousands of *abangan* communities.

In 1968, President Suharto issued a decree that required all Indonesian citizens to list one of five state-sanctioned religions on their identity cards: Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Hindu or Buddhist. Because of the *abangan* link to PKI, *kejawen* and other indigenous belief systems (*kepercayaan*) were not an option. Disgusted by the massacres they had just witnessed, millions of *abangan* and *priyayi* (Javanese aristocrats) chose to convert to Christianity, or revert to Hinduism. However, the vast majority of *abangan* Muslims listed Islam on their identity cards. Haunted by the recent holocaust, which had transformed vast areas of Java into a killing field, many felt it wise to inoculate their children against future risk (i.e., massacre) by teaching them to observe the formal practices of Islam, while neglecting their *kejawen* roots.

Suharto, himself a *kejawen* Muslim and nationalist—but above all, a brilliant opportunist—promptly cracked down on Islamist extremism, as he consolidated power in the late ‘60s. Yet when confronted by Abdurrahman Wahid’s, Nurcholish Madjid’s and other Muslim leaders’ mobilization of the Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah and civil society in general to promote democracy in the late ‘80s and ‘90s, Suharto cynically mobilized Islamist ideologues to counter his opponents.

Establishment of the Suharto-backed Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI)—which advocated the social, political and economic dominance of Muslims—and of a “green gener-

als” faction in the military, occurred in tandem with the rise of a Saudi-funded *da'wa*, or proselytism movement on university campuses, whose Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated alumni were quick to establish political parties when Abdurrahman Wahid and his democracy-movement allies finally toppled the Suharto regime in 1998.

The reform era launched by Suharto's downfall brought dramatic changes to Indonesia, such as freedom of the press; the revocation of state-sanctioned discrimination against ethnic minorities, including the Chinese; and the subordination of military to civilian authority, which constitute three of Abdurrahman's Wahid's greatest achievements during his brief tenure as President (1999 – 2001), before remnants of the Suharto regime managed to impeach and remove him from office, on the alleged grounds of “incompetence.” Yet the very freedom that liberated Indonesians from the arbitrary dictates of Suharto's regime also permitted the blossoming of religious extremism, as Wahhabi/Muslim Brotherhood ideology and Arab petrodollars encouraged indigenous extremists to revive the dream of an Islamic state, which Indonesia's founding fathers (including President Wahid's own father and grandfather) had firmly rejected.

Few people, today, recall the fact that Kyai Haji Hasyim Asyari and other traditional religious scholars founded the Nahdlatul Ulama in January of 1926, in direct response to the Wahhabi conquest of Mecca and Medina approximately sixteen months before. After a delegation of Indonesian *ulama* failed to persuade the new Saudi rulers to allow Muslims freedom of worship in the Haramain (the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina), President Wahid's grandfather and other Indonesian Muslims called for a spiritual “awakening of the *ulama*” (literally, *nahdlatul ulama*), to prevent the spread of Wahhabi influence to the East Indies. Within a few years, the organization they established had become the world's largest Muslim organization, whose followers currently number well over 40 million.

The historical antecedents of the NU—which traces its spiritual heritage to the saints who propagated Islam in Java, and one in particular known as Sunan Kalijogo—are also significant. For

the sixteenth century was a time of great upheaval and bloodshed on the Indonesian island of Java, as newly Muslim city-states along its northern coast destroyed local Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, and extended their power to the island's interior.

Flush with victory, fanatical adherents of the new religion—many of Arab or Chinese descent—spread terror as they sought to eradicate the island's ancient cultural heritage, and obtain a monopoly on economic and political power, under the pretext of serving the One True God. Opposing them were indigenous Javanese—now led by Islamic saints and political figures, such as Sunan Kalijogo—who sought continuity and a common ground between religions, based on the precepts of tolerance and mysticism.

For nearly a hundred years, the opposing forces struggled for the soul of Java—and, ultimately, for that of Islam—in a war whose decisive engagements occurred not only on the field of battle, but in the hearts and minds of countless individuals scattered across its lush, tropical landscape. For in this conflict between orthodox, self-described “jihadists” and Sufi (mystically-inclined) Muslims, the Sufis' profound spiritual ideology—popularized among the masses by storytellers and musicians—played a role even more vital than that of economics or pure military force, in defeating religious extremism in Java.

In the end, a new dynasty arose, founded on the principle of “the throne for the people,” which established religious tolerance as the rule of law, and guaranteed freedom of conscience to all Javanese—two centuries before the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom and Bill of Rights separated church and state in America. The founder of that dynasty was a Javanese Sufi Muslim and disciple of Sunan Kalijogo named Senopati ing Alogo. The basis of Senopati's victory was the popular appeal of his message of freedom, justice and profound inner spirituality, in contrast to the fanaticism and tyranny of his political opponents.

Today, more than four centuries later, Kalijogo's and Senopati's legacy remains, in the form of Java's distinctly tolerant and pluralistic culture. Their ideological descendants continue to resist the tide of religious extremism, now funded by Gulf petrodollars and entrenched local elites, who use radical Islam for personal advance-

ment, or to attack and undermine the process of reform in Indonesian society.

Contemporary leaders—including those who produced *The Illusion of an Islamic State*—are not alone in their efforts, but supported by tens of millions of Indonesians, who wish to preserve their culture’s enlightened embrace of religious tolerance and diversity.

Muslim extremists generally hate and fear Indonesian Islam, just as they despise and denounce other forms of Sufism throughout the Islamic world. The fact that the largest Muslim population in the world (Indonesia’s) does not share the radicals’ intolerant Wahhabi/Salafi views is a constant source of irritation to many Saudis and other Islamists. As a result, Indonesia is in the cross-hairs: the target of a sustained militant Islamist campaign to destroy the most liberal and tolerant form of Islam on earth, by: 1) trying to rewrite and/or reinterpret the Indonesian constitution, to incorporate Islamic law; 2) funding terrorism; 3) instituting piecemeal legislative change; and 4) domination of towns and provinces where the militants can impose their views through local support or by intimidation.

In many ways, Indonesia resembles Britain in World War II. Hitler’s failure to seize the UK cost him that war, as Britain transformed itself into an “unsinkable aircraft carrier,” and the base from which the liberation of Europe was launched. Similarly—given its rich spiritual traditions, and extensive population of *ulama* (Muslim religious scholars) who possess a profound knowledge of both the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam—Indonesia can serve as a launching pad for an intellectual and cultural assault upon extremist ideology throughout the Muslim world.

Muslim extremists are determined to prevent this from happening. For decades, the Wahhabis have been quietly promoting strict Islam in Indonesia: financing educational institutions; providing scholarships to study at Saudi universities; funding radical Islamist groups to wage jihad against Christians, Westerners and even Muslims whose understanding and practice of Islam differs from their own; building mosques and hiring Islamist imams (religious leaders); churning out translations of militant Islamist texts from Arabic to Indonesian and subsidizing their distribution to

millions; and attempting to discredit spiritual and progressive Islamic leaders.

As Paul Marshall of Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom has written, “The struggle against extremist Islam is not only military and diplomatic, it is also a war of ideas. In this battle there are few more important countries than Indonesia, whose 230 million people make it by far the largest Muslim country and democracy. It is also the home of the largest concentration of Muslims developing an understanding of Islam at home in a democratic and diverse world, and committed to resisting the reactionary versions being exported from Saudi Arabia.”

The enormous popularity, controversy and impact of *The Illusion of an Islamic State*—upon the fourth most populous country in the world, after China, India and the U.S.—suggests its relevance to the world at large, where Muslims and non-Muslims alike continue to grapple with issues concerning the nature of Islam and its proper role in society, as well as the ongoing threat of terrorism.

### **Project Objectives and Overview**

When President Wahid and I conceived and designed the project in the fall of 2005, it was in the context of this global struggle for the “soul of Islam,” and with four distinct objectives in mind, as articulated soon thereafter in LibForAll’s business plan (*cf.* Appendix 3, “Project Description”):

- Help stem the tide of radical Islam in Indonesia and use it as a “launching pad” from which to stimulate opposition to the Wahhabi/Salafi agenda in the rest of the Islamic world;
- Mobilize traditional Muslim leadership and masses, who are not yet radicalized, to consciously oppose the spread of militant Islam;
- Expose and discredit Wahhabi/Salafi proselytism activities, which are a crucial factor in the spread of Islamist extremism worldwide; and
- Establish a proven template for discrediting Wahhabi/Salafi extremism, which can be effectively replicated in other parts of the Muslim world.

In order to document the project's impact—and enable readers to evaluate the extent to which it has, and has not, achieved the goals outlined above—this English language edition includes not only the complete text of the original, translated from Indonesian, but several new appendices that contain over 150 pages of selected media/internet coverage of *The Illusion of an Islamic State* and its impact, which appeared in the weeks, months and years following its launch.

In the interest of providing a brief overview of the book's contents for those who may not have time to read the entire document, the work opens with a prologue by Dr. Syafii Maarif, whose pointed reference to “fundamentalist Christian groups” as the “primary supporters” of “President George W. Bush's... neo-imperialist regime” reflects the diversity of views held by the Muslim leaders who joined in making this project successful.

What united President Wahid, Mustofa Bisri and Syafii Maarif was not their political views (which differ dramatically), but rather, their resolute opposition to Islamist movements and their “totalitarian-centralistic” ideology, based on a harsh, narrow and rigid understanding of Islam. The fact that President Wahid (who deeply appreciated the American founders' ideal of limited government); Kyai Haji Mustofa Bisri (who is apolitical) and Dr. Syafii Maarif (whose views incline towards a European social-democratic model) could set aside these differences so readily, provides an implicit rebuke to those in the West who allow their disdain for political opponents to lead them into a misbegotten alliance with Wahhabi/Muslim Brotherhood activists, whose “civilizational jihad” against the West parallels the infiltration of Indonesian society documented by this book.

President Wahid's introduction to *The Illusion of an Islamic State* constitutes an executive summary of the work as a whole; a theological rejection of Islamist ideology, by one of the world's leading Muslim scholars, who was trained in the classical traditions of Islam; and a ringing call to action, to “[h]alt in its tracks and eliminate—using responsible methods—the vicious cycle of radicalization that spreads extremist ideology and doctrine.” Significantly, President Wahid singles out and condemns the insidious link between

extremist movements and opportunistic politicians and political parties, which have “joined the extremists in driving our nation towards a deep chasm, which threatens destruction and national disintegration... [due to] the fact that radical movements have already succeeded in infiltrating to the heart of government institutions, and are using these to accomplish their goals.”

Chapter I (“A Study of Transnational Islamist Movements and Their Accomplices in Indonesia”) describes the study’s purpose and methodology, and highlights a number of its key findings. These include the fact that—far from leading a socially or economically marginalized existence—the overwhelming majority of the 591 extremists interviewed for the study were “‘white collar’ professionals, and included government employees, university professors, university students, teachers, businessmen, regional legislators (DPRD), college deans and local chairmen of political parties.”

Another prominent characteristic of respondents that should be noted is that of *dual membership*, whereby a respondent maintained simultaneous memberships in both a moderate and an extremist group. Nearly all of the field researchers encountered this *dual membership* phenomenon, which was especially prevalent in the Muhammadiyah community. This demonstrates that extremist groups have already engaged in systematic infiltration of the Muhammadiyah and NU. They are conducting guerilla-style campaigns to transform the Muhammadiyah and NU from moderate Islamic organizations into radical movements, remade in the image of the extremist organizations that are infiltrating them.

Chapter II (“The Origins and Global Spread of Wahhabi/Muslim Brotherhood Ideology”) provides extensive background regarding the ideology and history of these movements in the Middle East, and as “transplanted” to Indonesia over the past 40 years, as part of a “global Wahhabization” campaign heavily funded by Arab petrodollars. Among its notable findings:

The primary factors that induce local extremist leaders and activists to affiliate themselves with one of the above-mentioned transnational Islamist movements are: financial opportunism; a desire for power; social environment and/or social dislocation; and/or a weak understanding of religious teachings, especially in regard to spiritual matters... However, the most important causal factor leading to infatuation with extremist movements is a shallow understanding of religion (i.e., Islamic teachings)...

Anyone who is unfamiliar with the complexity of *ta'wil* (exegesis of religious texts), as widely practiced by Sunni Muslim theologians, may have difficulty confronting the theological claims asserted by extremist groups, which base their interpretations on a literal reading of the texts in question. Even those with a conventional university education can be easily deceived to support the radicals' political agenda, as proven by this study, which found that a disproportionate number of college students and professionals not only sympathize with, but have become active cadres in the PKS and Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia... *Significantly, it is spirituality, more than any other aspect of life, that extremist groups reject.*

Chapter III (“The Ideology and Agenda of Extremist Movements in Indonesia”) begins with an essay, written by Nahdlatul Ulama theologian Kyai Haji Hodri Arieu under President Wahid’s supervision, which dissects and refutes the extremist understanding of *shari’ah*, and instead positions *shari’ah* as

a path to attain the level of actually knowing, and fulfilling, God’s will (*ridlâ*) through spiritual apprehension... Every attempt to formalize religion [through the imposition of Islamic law, and the establishment of an Islamic state, and/or caliphate] has a pure political objective: viz., to seize power. When extremists claim that their actions

are based on the fact that God—Pure and Exalted is He!—dictates every aspect of human life, this constitutes a blatant theological error that must be refuted and rejected. No specific form of government, nor the formalization of religion, are needed to create a good *muslim*. All that is actually required is self-transcendent spiritual awareness, so that one may constantly feel the presence of God (*ihsân*). Thus, extremist claims that they will create an “Islamic society” by implementing *shari‘a* or establishing an Islamic state or caliphate are nothing more than political maneuvers employed to justify the seizure of power.

Chapter IV (“The Infiltration of Indonesian Islam by Extremist Agents”) examines the success radicals have achieved infiltrating the Muhammadiyah; the Nahdlatul Ulama; the quasi-governmental Indonesian Council of Religious Scholars (MUI); schools and universities; government institutions and businesses. Among its many trenchant observations, the chapter describes how:

The combination of a virulent ideology, backed by enormous financial resources deployed in a systematic manner, has enabled extremist infiltration to become increasingly broad, deep and threatening to the people and nation of Indonesia....

In an official document published by the PKS itself, the Justice and Prosperity Party explicitly talks about spreading its cadres [throughout Indonesian society] through a three-stage process: *first*, the spread of *da‘wa* (proselytism) cadres to organizations/institutions in the various fields of life, with these cadres focusing their efforts on reaching the respective organizations’/institutions’ centers of power and policy; *second*, to ensure these *da‘wa* cadres have a successful career within the target organizations/institutions; and *third*, for these *da‘wa* cadres to play a key role influencing, formulating, interpreting and implementing these organizations’/institutions’ public

policies, to ensure they are consistent with Islamic *manhaj* (methods).

Chapter V (“Conclusion and Recommendations”) summarizes the study’s findings, and provides twelve strategic recommendations to the Indonesian public, to “prevent extremist groups from dominating Indonesia, and guarantee that moderate Muslims once again ‘color’ the life of our people, and government, in such a way as to protect the rights of minorities, and ensure that religion truly functions as a blessing for all sentient beings.”

In his concluding essay, “Never Cease Learning,” Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri writes:

If Muslims were all driven by a passion to learn, and to listen to others, their understanding of Islam would become progressively more wise and complete. As a consequence, they would not seek to reduce Islam to a mere ideology or rule of state. They would realize that Islam is too great to be boxed into a narrow ideology, or confined by the limits of state laws. For that reason, the vital insight contained in this book is the struggle (*jihad*) to constantly inspire every person to learn without ceasing; to oppose ignorance; to inspire all people to open their hearts and minds to humanity; and the struggle (*jihad*) to free every man, woman and child on earth from ideological and dogmatic strictures which have long prevented them from understanding the glorious teachings of religion, and instead confined their comprehension to those elements of the message that they can squeeze into a narrow box of their own or others’ construction.

To repeat: we may overcome our ignorance by seeing, listening and paying close attention; that is, by constantly learning. What halts this process dead in its tracks, and poses a threat to oneself and others, is when people feel that their knowledge is already perfect, and consider themselves to be in possession of the absolute Truth, and

thus no longer in need of learning, or seeking the truth. Perhaps all would agree that ignorance is highly dangerous. Yet not everyone is aware of the hidden dangers of ignorance, which dwell within.

*WaLlāhu A‘lam.* God alone knows the truth of all things.

Appendix 1 (“Policy of the Muhammadiyah Central Board Concerning the Consolidation of Organizations and Charitable Enterprises within Muhammadiyah”) reproduces the text of a Muhammadiyah Central Board Decree banning the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated PKS from the Muhammadiyah, and warning its members to

adopt a critical attitude which recognizes that every political party in this nation—including those that claim to represent ‘*da‘wa*’ or Islamic proselytism activities, such as Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS)—are in fact mere political parties. Every political party is focused on the acquisition of political power. For that reason, in dealing with any political party, we must always remain committed to the true Path of the Muhammadiyah and must free ourselves from, and never engage ourselves with, the mission, interests, activities or goals of the above-mentioned political parties.

Appendix 2 (“Documents from the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board Rejecting Transnational Extremist Movements and Their Ideology”) reproduces the text of an NU *fatwa* regarding whether or not Muslims have a religious duty to establish a caliphate and/or formalize *shari‘a*, or Islamic jurisprudence, as the basis of a nation’s legal system. Readers may be especially interested in the theological argument presented by *ulama* (religious scholars) from the world’s largest Muslim organization, in rejecting extremist demands to establish a caliphate—which has no basis either in the Qur’an, or the life of the Prophet Muhammad—and their citation of over a thou-

sand years of Islamic jurisprudence in support of their position.

As mentioned previously: the remaining appendices in this book were assembled especially for the English language edition of *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, and did not appear in the original Indonesian edition. When read in conjunction with the rest of the book, Appendix 3 (“Project Description from LibForAll Foundation’s 2006 Business Plan”) demonstrates the remarkable extent to which this ambitious project was able to achieve its original objectives. Appendix 4 (“PKS Derailed by Wahhabi Issue”) contains selected news coverage of the sequence of events that led to PKS being denied the Vice Presidential nomination by incumbent Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in the 2009 national election. Instead, President Yudhoyono appointed a Javanese nationalist/technocrat, with a profoundly tolerant understanding of Islam, to this vital position. The election of Vice President Boediono—who received his doctorate from the Wharton School of Business at Pennsylvania University—was a profound disappointment to the PKS and its cadres, who continue to roil Indonesia’s parliament in their efforts to undermine this widely-respected economist and former governor of the Bank of Indonesia.

Appendix 5 (“Selected Indonesian Media/Internet Coverage of *The Illusion of an Islamic State* as the Book Went Viral”) provides a sampling of articles about the book that appeared between 16 May and 4 June 2009, and following terrorist attacks on the Marriott and Ritz-Carlton Hotels in Jakarta on 17 July 2009, as well as the book’s continuing impact. Of particular note is the explosive coverage of *The Illusion of an Islamic State* on the internet, where a Google search for the three word string “Ilusi Negara Islam” turned up virtually no results prior to the book’s publication, and soared dramatically—to over 556,000 results (i.e., individual webpages containing these three words, in sequence)—within three weeks of the book’s hard launch in Jakarta.

Also noteworthy was the turbo-charged “second wind” the book received in the wake of the July 2009 terrorist bombings mentioned above. Citing President Wahid and *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, the former head of Indonesia’s national intelligence agency (BIN), A.M. Hendropriyono, immediately declared, in print and

on national television, that “Wahhabi ideology” lay behind the attacks carried out by al-Qaeda’s Indonesian affiliate, Jemaah Islamiyah.

Following on the heels of the book’s enormous success in May/June of 2009, this unleashed a second firestorm of controversy, to the extent that the two most widely-circulated extremist publications in Indonesia (*Sabili* and *Hidayatullah*) each devoted an entire issue to *The Illusion of an Islamic State* and the ensuing “Wahhabi controversy,” as they sought to defend extremist ideology from widespread public revulsion. Indeed, the general reaction was so strong that by May of 2010, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Andrew Higgins was able to report, in the *Washington Post*, that *Sabili* itself had undergone a profound transformation: “*Sibili* [sic], meanwhile, has toned down its anti-Western rhetoric. ‘We now see bigger potential for sales among moderate Muslims,’ said Lufti Tamimi, the magazine’s editor and part-owner. In January [2010], Tamimi ditched *Sibili*’s hard-line editor and commissioned a series of articles denouncing Salafism, a purist strain of Islam that underpins extremist ideology.”

Finally, Appendix 6 (“Excerpts from *Preventing Violent Radicalization and Terrorism: The Case of Indonesia*”) provides further documentary evidence of the project’s success, from a study conducted by the Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies at Sweden’s National Defense College, at the behest of the Swedish international development agency, or SIDA. This report has found a home in government libraries from Brussels (the European Union) to the White House, and has been widely cited by news media and governments alike, including Indonesia’s foreign minister, as evidence of the positive contribution Indonesian civil society can make, to overcoming the ideology that underlies and animates terrorism.

Yet for all these indications of success, it is critical to note that *The Illusion of an Islamic State* represents merely a single battle on a single front in what is actually a global conflict, whose outcome will profoundly influence the future not only of Muslim-majority nations, but the entire world.

Even in Indonesia itself, *The Illusion of an Islamic State* has by no means led to the defeat of Islamic extremism. Stunned by pub-

lic revelations of its Wahhabi/Muslim Brotherhood origins, at the height of the 2009 election season, the PKS “fell victim and was gravely wounded” (*Sabili* magazine), yet managed to cling to its alliance with Yudhoyono’s Democrat Party, and secure four key cabinet positions in his second term administration.

The spotlight which *The Illusion of an Islamic State* focused on the PKS and its systematic infiltration of the Muhammadiyah, did force the PKS to suspend its efforts to gain control of the mass organization, and provided the Muhammadiyah with sufficient breathing room to cleanse its leadership of many Islamist radicals associated with the PKS and Hizb ut-Tahrir. Extremists notably failed to achieve their goal of dominating the Muhammadiyah’s 2010 Congress, and LibForAll associates within the Muhammadiyah report that the organization is now systematically vetting potential leaders to weed out those who adhere to extremist ideology.

Yet PKS efforts to penetrate the Nahdlatul Ulama, and its traditional redoubts in rural communities, is proceeding apace. While rebranding itself as an “open and inclusive” political party and adopting a new slogan transparently inspired by LibForAll Foundation, “*PKS untuk semua*” (“PKS for All”), the party continues to infiltrate Indonesian society, and prepare for the 2014 elections.

At the Nahdlatul Ulama’s 2010 Congress, LibForAll senior advisor Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri was appointed Deputy Chairman (and functional day-to-day head) of the NU’s Supreme Council. In that position, he is seeking to “mobilize the NU to help stop extremist infiltration of government, the MUI and other strategic fields; help develop Indonesia into a more just and prosperous nation; and position the NU to assume the lead in efforts to free the world from the crisis of misunderstanding about Islam, and thus rescue humanity from the dangers of religious extremism” (Chapter V, Strategic Recommendation # 5). Yet he and his allies face an enormous uphill battle. As the largest single voting bloc in Indonesia, the NU must grapple with systematic infiltration not only by extremist movements, but also by opportunistic political parties and politicians that seek to prevent the NU from uniting to speak with a single voice, and thereby hold the government accountable for its policies.

To cite just one example: in February of 2011, I was visiting

Kyai Haji Mustofa Bisri in his home in Rembang, Central Java, when two gentlemen from an Islamic institution arrived to seek his advice, in conjunction with a project funded by a major government ministry in Jakarta.

The head of the ministry is affiliated with an Islamist political party that is involved in the extremists' prolonged and intense campaign to ban the Ahmadiyah sect, which mainstream Muslims often regard as heretical. Following the death of President Wahid—who tirelessly defended the Ahmadiyah for decades, along with Christians, Confucians, Bahais and other religious and ethnic minorities—extremist attempts to ban the Ahmadiyah appear to be on the verge of success in Indonesia.

Asked about their funding, the visitors explained, with embarrassment, that the ministry in question had provided 3.5 billion rupiah (close to US\$400,000), of which 50% had to be disbursed, off the top, to local cadres affiliated with the Minister's political party. Sources within the Nahdlatul Ulama indicate that these cadres, in turn, are systematically using the funds generated by this and other Ministry grants to mobilize support within the NU, and obstruct its leadership from coalescing around the vision of pluralism, tolerance and moral responsibility espoused by Kyai Haji Mustofa Bisri and his allies.

The fact that this one grant, to a single institution, provided extremists with nearly half the funds LibForAll spent on the entire project described in this book, provides some idea of the enormous scale of funding that is available to political opportunists and their extremist allies. As President Wahid warned in his article “Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam,” which the *Wall Street Journal* published in December of 2005: “Islamic fundamentalism has become a well-financed, multi-faceted global movement that operates like a juggernaut in much of the developing world, and even among immigrant Muslim communities in the West.”

With an unfailing instinct for the critical role played by finance in any organized movement, extremists not only seek to maximize the resources available to themselves, but also to starve their opponents of funding. A well-coordinated media campaign conducted by extremists—which portrayed the Asia Foundation and

Ford Foundation as Zionist/CIA agents—was apparently enough to frighten both foundations, and the U.S. embassy/USAID in Jakarta, away from funding so-called “liberal” Muslims, as reported by Andrew Higgins in another front-page story in the *Washington Post*, “As Indonesia Debates Islam’s Role, U.S. Stays Out” (28 October 2009).

Just before *The Illusion of an Islamic State*’s hard launch in May of 2009, Indonesia’s largest print media conglomerate, which owns the nation’s largest newspaper and a chain of approximately 300 bookstores, purchased every copy of the book’s first print run, other than a few hundred required for distribution at the launch itself. The group’s head of retail asked for an immediate reprint, and estimated that their bookstores would sell over 100,000 copies in the weeks ahead. Less than 24 hours later, this same man called me personally to apologize, and asked to return the books from his company’s warehouse, where they had been delivered. His frank explanation: his office had already received credible threats that bookstores would be burned down, if they stocked *The Illusion of an Islamic State*.

Prior to these developments, LibForAll had prepared an electronic version of the book, and set up a website ([www.bhinnekatunggalika.org](http://www.bhinnekatunggalika.org)) where it could be downloaded for free. In the weeks following the book’s hard launch, nearly 45,000 copies were indeed downloaded from this site, with hundreds of thousands of additional copies of *The Illusion of an Islamic State* apparently downloaded from other websites that posted the pdf file online, including 12 sites advertising such downloads (e.g., “Download Gratis Buku Illusi Negara Islam”) whose rank, on Google, consistently exceeded our own.

Ironically, when some of the largest media outlets in Indonesia reported that the book’s unavailability in stores was due to the threat of terrorism, extremist publications responded that this was merely a clever pretext, to “slander Islam” and justify LibForAll giving away hundreds of thousands of copies for free on the internet.

Another issue arose when three members of the “Yogya Team” that conducted field research for this project (out of 27), and one of their six supervisors, held a press conference at the height of

the controversy surrounding the book. At this press conference, they protested the inclusion of their names in the book (in a table that specifically identified, by name, those who conducted the field research in each of 24 districts in Indonesia). The gentlemen also stated that the book included material beyond the scope of their own research/findings, and objected to not having been consulted prior to its publication.

There was some element of truth to these complaints. Inclusion of the field researchers' names in the first Indonesian edition of the book apparently exposed at least one of the protestors to death threats from members of the extremist group he had interviewed. And as explained in Chapter I, the research contained in this book was conducted by two separate teams, managed by a "Jakarta Team" operating under the direct supervision and authority of President Wahid. This Jakarta Team (whose key members are identified in the English edition of this book as "Principal Authors/Editorial Team") exercised provisional control over the book's contents, subject to President Wahid's review and approval as chief editor.

The Yogya Team's field research, including its interviews with 591 Muslim extremists, was only one of three research components contained within the book. And while the Jakarta Team extensively reviewed and revised the final product in consultation with the chairman of the Yogya Team (Dr. Abdul Munir Mulkhan) and other prominent Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama figures, individual researchers and supervisors from the Yogya Team were not involved in reviewing the final product, other than one supervisor (Dr. Ratno Lukito) who belonged to both the Jakarta and Yogya Teams, and played a key role in integrating their respective findings.

As it turned out, this protest by four ideological allies cast the only real (though minor) shadow on the book, whose heavily-documented findings could not be refuted by the extremists themselves, however much they tried to obfuscate the matter. *The Illusion of an Islamic State* nailed its case shut by reprinting an official decree of the Muhammadiyah Central Board—banning the PKS from its organization—as Appendix 1; and also reprinting fifty-five pages of

official NU documents that warned, in no uncertain terms, about the threat posed by transnational Islamist movements and their ideology to Indonesia, and Islam (“Appendix 2”).

Rather than refute the book’s theological arguments and/or its academic findings, the extremists—unaccustomed to being on the defensive—were reduced to expedients such as denying their ties to Wahhabism (*cf.* Appendix 4, “PKS Derailed by Wahhabi Issue”) or hurling baseless and humorous accusations such as, “My guess is that funding for the book’s research came from Bush. It represents Bush’s final project, before his fall from power” (PKS Vice Secretary Fahri Hamzah, quoted by *inilah.com*, in the wake of the book’s “soft launch” on 2 April 2009).

In fact, the money for this project (except for the book’s printing and subsequent hard launch) was provided by a single high net worth donor from the U.S., who has no affiliation with any government or government agency. The printing and launch itself was financed by a grant from the Security Policy Department of Sweden’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs, as part of a project entitled “The Smiling Face of Islam,” whose goal was to facilitate “the spread of pluralistic and tolerant ideas between Indonesia and other parts of the Islamic world.”

To cite one more example of the extremists’ response (many more of which may be read in Appendix 5): shortly after the July 2009 terrorist bombings in Jakarta—and the ensuing “anti-Wahhabi” firestorm that swept through Indonesia’s mainstream media, and much of the general public—*Sabili* magazine sought to deflect criticism of Wahhabi ideology. It did so by claiming that “foreign intelligence agencies” and other “enemies of Islam” are “deliberating maintaining terrorist groups,” so that “whenever the plans of those who wish to destroy Muslims and Indonesia are ripe, they simply click their fingers and launch a deadly terrorist strike,” in conjunction with the “ideological warfare” represented by “the book *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, which attacks political Islam... [and] is more powerful, and dangerous, than bombs.” (*Sabili*, 12 August 2009).

Far more serious than the reactive and generally delusional response of extremists, was President Wahid’s own ill health during and after the book’s launch. On the day of the launch itself, the

major figures associated with *The Illusion of an Islamic State* gathered in Jakarta to establish a movement (Gerakan Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, or the Oneness Amid Diversity Movement) to systematically implement the book's strategic recommendations, contained in Chapter 5 ("Summary and Recommendations").

When the meeting ended and everyone else had left the boardroom to rest prior to the launch that evening, I remained behind with President Wahid, and sat alone with him for about 45 minutes, in complete silence. Finally, he said, "You know, Holland, my entire body is wracked with pain." When I expressed sympathy for his condition, he replied, "Every time I undertake something really important, I feel pain throughout my body." We were silent again for a few moments, and he added, "I know from the tremendous pain I feel right now, that what we're doing today will be enormously successful." Then President Wahid called his assistant Sulaiman, who was waiting outside with several of his bodyguards, to take him upstairs in his wheelchair, to rest prior to the launch.

Perhaps the single greatest disappointment, amid the project's otherwise remarkable success, was LibForAll's (i.e., my) failure to immediately organize and set in motion the widespread civil society movement we discussed that day in Jakarta. Having exhausted LibForAll's financial resources in bringing the book to market, I returned to the U.S. immediately after the launch, to engage in fundraising. And while we did secure the resources necessary to keep LibForAll afloat, and drive forward another, potentially far more significant program (LibForAll's International Institute of Qur'anic Studies), we were unable to simultaneously exploit the unique opportunity at hand. Severe time, personnel and monetary constraints prevented us from following up on the success of *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, to organize the millions of Indonesians who spontaneously voiced agreement with its denunciation of religious extremism, into a systematic movement for social and political change (i.e., the Bhinneka Tunggal Ika Movement).

As the Greek historian Polybius wrote in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, "Those who have won victories are far more numerous than those who have used them to their advantage." The British military historian B.H. Lidell Hart made a similar point, when he observed

about the Roman general and consul, Scipio Africanus (who defeated Hannibal and ended the Carthaginian threat to Rome): “Masterly as were his battle tactics, still more remarkable perhaps were the decisiveness and rapidity of their exploitation, which find no parallel in military history until Napoleon came to develop the pursuit as the vital complement of battle and one of the supreme tests of generalship.”

Failure to exploit strategic advantage, to systematically isolate and discredit Islamist extremists and sever their relationship with opportunistic political allies, allows the extremists precious time to recuperate and regain their momentum, as can be clearly seen in Indonesia today. To use a military analogy: among the many valuable lessons that can be derived from this “path-breaking” project—for anyone who seeks to discredit Islamist ideology—is the necessity of having sufficient “troops” in reserve (i.e., trained personnel and resources) to ensure the determined pursuit of a defeated and demoralized opponent, in order to secure lasting victory.

A single battle rarely determines the outcome of any widespread conflict, and history is replete with generals who “won a major battle, but lost the war.”

This, in turn, sheds light on the enormous confusion that has prevailed in the West ever since 9/11, regarding how best to confront (or *not* confront) Islamist extremism. As President Wahid warned in his 2005 article “Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam”:

All too many Muslims fail to grasp Islam, which teaches one to be lenient towards others and to understand their value systems, knowing that these are tolerated by Islam as a religion. The essence of Islam is encapsulated in the words of the Quran, “For you, your religion; for me, my religion.” That is the essence of tolerance. Religious fanatics—either purposely or out of ignorance—pervert Islam into a dogma of intolerance, hatred and bloodshed. They justify their brutality with slogans such as “Islam is above everything else.” They seek to intimidate and subdue anyone who does not share their extremist views, regardless of nationality or religion. While a few are quick

to shed blood themselves, countless millions of others sympathize with their violent actions, or join in the complicity of silence.

This crisis of misunderstanding—of Islam by Muslims themselves—is compounded by the failure of governments, people of other faiths, and the majority of well-intentioned Muslims to resist, isolate and discredit this dangerous ideology. The crisis thus afflicts Muslims and non-Muslims alike, with tragic consequences. Failure to understand the true nature of Islam permits the continued radicalization of Muslims world-wide, while blinding the rest of humanity to a solution which hides in plain sight.

The most effective way to overcome Islamist extremism is to explain what Islam truly is to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Without that explanation, people will tend to accept the unrefuted extremist view—further radicalizing Muslims, and turning the rest of the world against Islam itself.

Accomplishing this task will be neither quick nor easy. In recent decades, Wahhabi/Salafi ideology has made substantial inroads throughout the Muslim world. Islamic fundamentalism has become a well-financed, multifaceted global movement that operates like a juggernaut in much of the developing world, and even among immigrant Muslim communities in the West. To neutralize the virulent ideology that underlies fundamentalist terrorism and threatens the very foundations of modern civilization, we must identify its advocates, understand their goals and strategies, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, and effectively counter their every move. What we are talking about is nothing less than a global struggle for the soul of Islam....

Only by recognizing the problem, putting an end to the bickering within and between nation-states, and adopting a coherent long-term plan (executed with international leadership and commitment) can we begin to apply the brakes to the rampant spread of extremist ideas and hope to resolve the world's crisis of misunderstanding before the global economy and modern civilization itself begin to crumble in the face of truly devastating attacks.

Muslims themselves can and must propagate an understanding of the “right” Islam, and thereby discredit extremist ideology. Yet to accomplish this task requires the understanding and support of like-minded individuals, organizations and governments throughout the world. Our goal must be to illuminate the hearts and minds of humanity, and offer a compelling alternate vision of Islam, one that banishes the fanatical ideology of hatred to the darkness from which it emerged.

Having lived three years in Iran as a child (from 1965 - '68); traveled extensively in Afghanistan and Pakistan prior to the Soviet invasion; and spent much of the past 12 years in Java, I have enjoyed the good fortune of having been surrounded, for much of my life, by the “right” Islam President Wahid described so well in his many writings, and through the example of his life.

One day, while reviewing the manuscript of this book shortly before its publication, President Wahid said, “You know, Holland, I often tell Muslims: ‘It’s impossible to understand Islam, if you don’t understand other religions.’” We both knew that he was not referring to dogma, but rather, the spiritual essence of religion, which is to reunite with the Source—the Alpha and Omega of all existence.

Or as a Christian friend said to me, after meeting President Wahid when he visited the U.S. in May of 2008, to accept the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Medal of Valor for his role in the Bali Holocaust conference, at which he had publicly branded Mahmud Ahmadinejad a liar: “Holland, I keep asking myself: how do these

Muslim leaders you introduce me to, know what I know?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, hoping that she would be more explicit, although I understood her question full well.

“It’s obvious that President Wahid is filled with the Holy Spirit.”

“How do you explain that?” I asked.

“Well,” my Pentecostal friend replied, “I wouldn’t be comfortable saying this to anyone at church... but the only explanation that makes sense to me, is that Jesus is far, far greater than I ever realized.”

I mention these conversations for a specific reason. More than seven years after President Wahid and I established LibForAll, it has become painfully obvious that one of the primary challenges faced by the West, in dealing with Islamist extremism, is a profound lack of understanding about Islam and the actual dynamics of the Muslim world. By and large, Westerners and Muslims live in “parallel universes,” which few can navigate at ease. Those who can readily traverse this enormous gap are often Wahhabi/Muslim Brotherhood agents, who seek to achieve an end state completely inimical not only to the West, but also the spiritual traditions of Islam itself.

Westerners who study the ideology of al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood have developed an increasingly acute, and accurate, awareness of its key elements. Yet for a variety of reasons, this very insight often leads Westerners (whether Christian, Jewish or atheist) to conflate said ideology with Islam itself, as if the religion were monolithic (with only one “true” expression), and to overlook those elements within Islam and the Muslim world which—if effectively mobilized—are capable of dismantling extremist movements and their underlying ideology.

In August of 2009, I visited President Wahid at his home in Cijangur, a suburb of Jakarta, to wish him a happy birthday. As I entered the spacious grounds of his home, which is flanked by a mosque and *pesantren* (*madrassa*), I heard the beautiful yet mournful sound of his students reciting Surah Yasin from the Qur’an, which Muslims often read in supplication to God, including on behalf of one who is near death. In doing so, they ask God to restore

the person to health, or accept his or her soul in paradise. At that moment, in hundreds if not thousands of mosques and *pesantren* throughout Indonesia, Muslims were gathered to recite the Surah Yasin for President Wahid, aware of his grave illness.

I entered his home to find the furniture in the reception room cleared away, and my friend lying on the floor, covered by a loose sarong and surrounded by visitors and family. His adjutants asked me to come close, and President Wahid whispered in my ear, in a barely audible voice, “You know, Holland. It’s very important if you can describe how America can help Islam.” Even on the threshold of death, his heart and mind were filled with compassion for humanity.

I thought deeply about his statement for the next two weeks, and when President Wahid experienced a remarkable recovery—which lasted for some time prior to his death on 30 December 2009—we discussed a new project at length, based on the idea he whispered to me that day. We decided to write a new book called *How the West Can Help Islam*, and outlined its key elements together. Given that many Westerners, to the extent they even think about Islam, are primarily concerned with defending themselves from it, President Wahid’s concept was both counter-intuitive and profoundly insightful.

Never, for an instant, did President Wahid “buy” the notion—widely propagated by Islamists, and many in the West—that European or American support for Muslim moderates, in their struggle with Islamist extremism, will somehow discredit the former. He considered LibForAll’s track record of success—including with *The Illusion of an Islamic State*—to be proof positive thereof. When asked whether the name LibForAll should appear on the cover of the original Indonesian edition of this book, he replied, “No. But I’ll describe what LibForAll is in the opening paragraph of my introduction, so that when people see the name, they’ll also realize who’s involved with the organization, and what our purpose is.”

Confident of his own “Islamicity,” and revered as a saint by tens of millions, from the East Indies archipelago to the Middle East, President Wahid knew that moderate/spiritual Muslims alone (and, by the same token, Westerners acting alone) can no

more derail the Islamist juggernaut than the Russians, Chinese or even Americans could have defeated the combined forces of Nazism and Japanese militarism in World War II, acting alone and without allies. Thus, although this book describes in great detail how to “fight fire with water”—i.e., how to marginalize and discredit Islamist ideology by drawing on universal spiritual principles deeply rooted within Islam itself—it does not ignore the practical dimensions of this challenge.

Nor should readers fall into the trap of assuming that Muslims who embrace the spiritual principles articulated in this book are pacifists or religious quietists, unable to address the threat of violence, or engage effectively with the world at large. While non-violent extremists (who seek to use the repressive apparatus of the state to impose their views on others) felt the intense heat of public opprobrium generated by this book, their ideological brethren from Jemaah Islamiyah and other terrorist groups were being hunted night and day, with dozens captured or killed by Indonesia’s elite counter-terrorist task force, Detachment 88. In the fall of 2009, former Muhammadiyah chairman and LibForAll advisor Dr. Syafii Maarif—who was also advising Indonesia’s security officials, in the wake of the July attacks—informed me that the top leadership of Indonesia’s police and military hierarchy viewed *The Illusion of an Islamic State* as an invaluable tool for understanding, and countering, terrorists and the ideology they share with a far broader spectrum of society, on which they rely for recruitment and support.

Upon hearing of the book’s dramatic impact in Indonesia, a former chairman of Pakistan’s armed forces—who is part of LibForAll’s counter-extremist *rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn* network—dispatched a similar message to us: “This is a great achievement, and I wish you all success as you move on in this direction.”

Since the attacks of 9/11, America and the West have played into al-Qaeda’s hands, by focusing the overwhelming preponderance of their energy on “fighting fire with fire,” while merely talking about, pretending to address or actively ignoring the hate-filled supremacist ideology that underlies and animates Islamist terrorism. All too often, Western governments and civil society institutions have been infiltrated by, or aligned themselves with, the Wah-

habi/Muslim Brotherhood lobby, which seeks to prevent the West from establishing an alliance with truly moderate and progressive Muslim leaders, who espouse a loving, merciful and compassionate vision of Islam.

Soon after Indonesia's presidential election in July of 2009, a key figure from the *istana*, or presidential palace, asked to meet with me to discuss *The Illusion of an Islamic State*. Over dinner she remarked, "*Para pejabat menganggap LibForAll sebagai sebuah yayasan yang luar biasa kuat dan sakti.*" ("Many government officials regard LibForAll as a remarkably powerful foundation, possessed of sacred, and supernatural, abilities"—like those of a magical *keris*, or dagger, that can fly through the night and strike its opponents to the quick.)

To use language more familiar to those living in the West, what she was saying was simple yet profound: LibForAll's success is directly attributable to the selfless Muslim leaders who form the backbone of its global network, and their heart-felt desire to work in a spirit of mutual cooperation and respect with others—whether Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim or atheist—who share a common love for humanity, and a desire to see Islamic teachings reconciled with the modern world of freedom, democracy and human rights. Current upheavals in the Middle East—and the escalating controversy about Islam and Islamophobia roiling North America and Europe—demonstrate the urgent need for such a process to occur.

Those who are uncomfortable with talk about God, or with any conception of God that differs from their own, may find *The Illusion of an Islamic State* a challenge to their settled notions of reality. Yet those who seriously read and reflect upon the message of this book may find themselves rewarded with the unique ability to cross over the vast gulf that separates Islam and the West, and make common cause with what President Wahid liked to call the vast, silent majority of Muslims, so that together we may strive "to illuminate the hearts and minds of humanity... and banish the fanatical ideology of hatred to the darkness from which it emerged."

Jakarta, 16 March 2011