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Trends in Southeast Asia

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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THE EDITORS

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia in 2014: The Political Economy of Discontent

By Gwenaël Njoto-Feillard

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- During the 2014 presidential election, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an organization committed to creating a global Islamic caliphate that would replace democracy, rejected both Joko Widodo's and Prabowo Subianto's candidacy. However, as in previous legislative elections, its members were allowed to vote for parliamentary candidates that would push for the application of Islamic law.
- HTI has been compelled to clarify its position regarding the emergence of support of IS in Indonesia. It clearly condemns IS's use of violence as a means of establishing the caliphate, but at the same time, it uses the issue to reinforce its anti-Western narrative.
- While HTI's transnational programme and opposition to democracy appear antithetical to Indonesia's current political situation, the organization may still find ways to mobilize in certain sectors of Indonesian society. HTI's strategy of expansion is flexible enough for it to adapt to recent developments and prudently adjust its discourse while holding firm to its ideological foundations.
- As long as economic development is perceived to yield inequalities and discrimination, the transnational organization will continue to have a foothold in Indonesia. It is probable that HTI will not embark on a path of political accommodation as it aims exclusively at the "market of discontent" within Indonesian society.

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia in 2014: The Political Economy of Discontent

By Gwenaël Njoto-Feillard[1]

INTRODUCTION

The year 2014 was a defining one not only for Indonesia and its people, but also for the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an organization committed to creating a global Islamic caliphate that would replace democracy, capitalism and the framework of nation states. Indeed, two processes have posed an ideological challenge to HTI and spurred a flurry of counter-arguments in its literature in recent months: first, the parliamentary and presidential elections have confirmed the relevancy of the democratic system (with all its shortcomings) for a majority of Indonesians;[2] and second, the violent rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (now renamed the "Islamic State", IS) in the Middle East is jeopardizing HTI's own ideal of the caliphate in the eyes of the Indonesian public. In recent years, a number of academic papers have been written on the origins, growth, structure and ideology of HTI.[3] The purpose of this article is to

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[2] Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia's 2014 Elections: How Jokowi Won and Democracy Survived", *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 4 (October 2014): 111–25.

[3] Claudia Nef-Saluz, "Promoting the Caliphate on Campus: Debates and Advocacies of Hizbut Tahrir Student Activists in Indonesia", in *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*, edited by Al-Rasheed, Madawi, Carool Kersten, and Marat Shterin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 185–205; Mohamed Osman, "Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia's Mobilization Strategy and Its Impact

give an update on the organization's ideological positioning in light of these important developments in Indonesia.

HTI is the Indonesian branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), a movement founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by the Palestinian intellectual and jurist, Taqiuddin an-Nahbani (1909–77). As he had close links to the Muslim Brotherhood, an-Nahbani was influenced by Islamist thought, which considers Islam as a total ideology that answers all questions and has to be applied to all domains of life (cultural, political, social, economic), demanding particularly an "Islamic state". Additionally, like many intellectuals of his time, an-Nahbani was also inspired by leftist ideas. What distinguished him from others, however, was the fact that he saw the revival of the caliphate as the true solution for the "community of believers", the *Ummah*, in ending "Western" domination, an example of which was the occupation of Palestine and the creation of Israel in 1948. For an-Nahbani, this political framework — entailing the global leadership of a caliph and the strict application of Islamic law — was the only way for Muslims to truly respect God's message.

Soon after its creation in 1953, Hizbut Tahrir (HT) was banned in Jordan. An-Nahbani was arrested and then spent the rest of his life in exile in Syria and Lebanon. However, HT managed to expand to other countries in the Middle East throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. It was supported particularly by Palestinians in Jordan and Lebanon.[4] In the 1960s, in reaction to HT's involvement in a series of coup attempts in Jordan, Syria and Iraq, its members were suppressed in these countries. Consequently,

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in Indonesia", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010): 601–22; Greg Fealy, "Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia: Seeking a 'Total' Islamic Identity", in *Islam and Political Violence: Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West*, edited by Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), pp. 151–64; Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "The Quest for Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia", *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37, no. 4 (2009): 623–645; Ken Ward, "Non-Violent Extremism: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2006): 149–64.

[4] This was probably due to the founder's Palestinian origins, but also to HTI support for the cause of Palestine.

the movement experienced a decline in the 1970s and 1980s. However, a revival of HT took place in the early 1990s: it expanded rapidly in post-Soviet Central Asia, North Africa, Turkey, Europe and Southeast Asia. Palestinians emigrants and intellectuals were the main vectors of its dissemination and transformed it into a global movement. HT does not disclose its membership numbers, but it is estimated that it could be between a few hundred thousand to more than a million members.[5]

The Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia was formed in the early 1980s.[6] It kept a relatively low profile during the Suharto years, as the regime was known to repress radical forms of political Islam. With the end of the New Order, the organization started a wide-ranging public expansion strategy. Greg Fealy suggested in 2007 that "by Indonesian standards, [it was still] a relatively small movement, which has remained on the fringe of the Muslim community since its emergence in 2000".[7] Because access to verifiable data is currently impossible, the real weight of HTI remains difficult to assess, but it has been estimated that its members are in the tens of thousands, with many tertiary students with science and technical backgrounds and middle-class professionals from urban areas.[8] Compared to the millions of members and sympathizers of the country's two largest

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[5] Fealy, "Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia: Seeking a 'Total' Islamic Identity", p. 154.

[6] HTI finds it origins in two individuals: Mama Abdullah bin Nuh and Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi. The former was an Islamic scholar who became disillusioned with the existing Islamic movements in the 1970s, which were considered to have failed to answer the problems besetting the Muslim community. He became particularly interested in HT ideology and came in contact with HT members who had migrated to Australia, among whom was Lebanese national al-Baghdadi. In 1982, the duo started disseminating HT ideology through bin Nuh's *pesantre*n (Islamic boarding school) and, later on, through more structured proselytizing programmes in campus Muslim groups, notably in larger state tertiary institutions (Bogor Agricultural Institute, Bandung Institute of Technology and Universitas Indonesia). Ibid., p. 155.

[7] Ibid., p. 151.

[8] Fealy notes that "rural and lower class membership appears small". Ibid., p. 156.

Islamic[9] organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, HTI can indeed be considered small in terms of members.

Clearly, HTI's objective (at least for now) is not to expand exponentially, but to form a core of fully dedicated cadres. This can be seen from its method of recruitment which is progressive and guarded: first, individuals are invited to a *dauroh*, short-term introductory classes; after which, dedicated members are given access to *halaqah* or study groups, which require committed personal involvement. These strongly dedicated individuals are supposed to form a vanguard of cadres who will convince Indonesian society of the necessity to adopt the caliphate model.

As noted by Fealy, HTI is probably the only Islamic organization in Indonesia that is controlled both structurally and ideologically by a central leadership that is based in the Middle East.[10] However, HTI is given a certain latitude to adapt to certain local issues. The question is how this process was articulated in regards to the two major events of 2014: the general elections and the threat of IS. To answer this, I analysed the official literature of HTI (its journal *Media Umat*, magazine *Al Wa'ie*, bulletin *Al Islam* and Internet site http://hizbut-tahrir.or.id/), as well as data from focus group discussions (FGDs) with its cadres and members.[11]

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[9] Islamic organizations are those that are based on Islam whereas Islamist organizations work towards Islamizing the State and society.

[10] In the diversified landscape of Islam in Indonesia, HTI occupies a peculiar place. It is transnational and therefore strongly opposes Indonesian nationalism, which is enshrined in the Pancasila, the State ideology. Interestingly, notwithstanding some fringe radical groups like the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia), most Islamic parties and organizations adhere to the framework of the Indonesian nation-state. This is evidently the case of mainstream moderate organizations NU and Muhammadiyah, but also the "moderate" Islamist party PKS, the more strictly Islamist party PBB, or again of neo-fundamentalist proselytizing organization Hidayatullah.

[11] For this study, the HTI representative, Ismail Yusanto, agreed to organize three focus discussion groups (Jakarta, Surabaya and Yogyakarta) with members of HTI (in May, June and August 2014). The author would like to thank him and the FGD participants for sharing their views. Each session comprised around fifteen

One of the objectives of the study is to determine how grassroots activists perceive — and possibly reinterpret — the official ideology of HTI, particularly on political themes such as democracy, political participation (or non-participation), and the role of Islamist and nationalist-secular parties. The second objective is to see if there can be an evolution within HTI towards a more conciliatory position on political participation. For now, it seems that HTI is clearly and exclusively targeting certain sectors of the population which harbour discontent towards the current political and economic situation. According to the organization's narrative, the culprit of this state of affairs is democracy, and its foundation, capitalism, and the only solution is the caliphate and the application of Islamic law.[12] However, if this strategy of aiming at discontent hinders its development, one has to ask if HTI will choose to adapt to the situation and participate in some form of political process.

Moreover, the underlying concern with regards to HTI is whether its ideology can be defined as "extremist" and whether it can be considered

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participants, men and women alike. However, this sample cannot be considered scientifically representative of the organization's landscape as the members had been chosen in advance by HTI. The organization is known to be very careful managing its image, as some issues that form part of its narrative are sensitive in the Indonesian context. However, the members who attended the FGDs were far from homogenous. Some came from Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and others from a more secular background. Some joined HTI more than ten years ago while others had been around for less than two years. All showed a high degree of commitment to the cause and a strong belief in the ideals of the Hizbut Tahrir. None showed hostility in defending the caliphate. They were most of all activists who were convinced that Indonesian society was in a state of impasse, and that the caliphate was the solution. Many came from higher education institutions linked to HTI, but whether they are representative of the current reality of HTI membership is open to debate. This study was thus limited to define the "market of discontent" in broad terms (see the conclusion), as it was not possible to operate a sociological typology.

[12] It is probable that HTI's application of Islamic law would entail "*hudud*" (punishments fixed in the Quran and hadith for crimes considered to be against the rights of God). However, HTI literature does not seem to promote the concept too vehemently, possibly because it is not a very popular theme in the Indonesian public.

"non-violent". Internationally, Hizbut Tahrir has been criticized for favouring the same views as terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda. However, there has not been any evidence of HTI involvement in any activities related to terrorism in Indonesia.[13] With the general condemnation of the atrocities committed in the name of IS, will HTI adopt a clearer position within its narrative on the subject of *jihad* and the caliphate?

CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM

(a) The 2014 General Elections

The 2014 general elections were a pivotal moment for Indonesia. The legislative election in April showed a general fragmentation of the political landscape and a relative rebound of Muslim-based parties, which had been said to be on the decline (32 per cent of total vote share in 2014, in comparison to 26 per cent in 2009). However, this signified more of a consolidation of traditional party affiliation than popular vote for an Islamist agenda. The presidential election in July illustrated an intense competition between Joko Widodo (the first-ever candidate who is not from the old political and economic elite circles) and Prabowo Subianto, the former son-in-law of Suharto and ex-leader of the Special forces (Kopassus), who symbolized, in contrast, a possible rollback to the country's authoritarian past.[14] The "strong man" appeal of Prabowo reflected a general "fatigue" of large sectors of Indonesian society in a democratic system that was deemed to promote national fragmentation, endemic corruption and socio-economic inequalities. Moreover, one of the main divides during this presidential campaign was centred on religion. Jokowi was supported by the Islamic traditionalist party, PKB,[15]

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[13] Ward, "Non-Violent Extremism: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia".

[14] Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesian Politics in 2014: Democracy's Close Call", *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 50, no. 3 (2014): 347–69.

[15] It should be noted that, as with other Islamic currents in Indonesia, the Traditionalists are far from being homogenous (in that one can find both "pluralist" and "conservative" figures).

and made clear during his campaign that he would defend an Islam that was plural, tolerant and anchored in the country's history and culture. Prabowo Subianto showed more ambiguity and was considered to be more open to the implementation of an Islamizing agenda. He thus managed to gather the support of Islamist parties, such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera) and the Crescent and Star Party (PBB, Partai Bulan Bintang), as well as radical and violent militias, like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam), the Betawi Rempug Forum (FBR, Forum Betawi Rempug) and the Pancasila Youth (PP, Pemuda Pancasila).[16]

The position of HTI was clear during the presidential campaign: they supported neither Jokowi nor Prabowo. However, the organization had to be cautious in justifying this double-rejection and the non-participation of its members in the political process (thereby avoiding being suspected of having authoritarian tendencies). After all, democracy (with all its limitations) is considered by the majority of the Indonesian people to be the best system of governance to date. Thus, HTI argued that it did not oppose the principle of "choosing" a leader, but rather the programmes defended by the two candidates. About a month before the elections, its bulletin *Al Islam* argued that a legitimate candidate had to have the following conditions: he had to be Muslim, a man who had come of age (*baligh*) and a just person who would be able to lead and implement his own policies. For HTI, an important condition was that a head of state had

[16] FPI was formed in 1998 at the fall of the New Order. During its formative years at least, the Islamic militia was known to have links with high-ranking figures of the police and the military. FPI has since used various violent means to impose its own vision of a pious and moral society based on the strict application of Islamic law. The FBR was created in 2001. Its objective is to defend the interests of Jakarta's so-called indigenous population, the Betawi, an ethnic marker that is associated with an Islamic identity. "Rempug" in Forum Betawi Rempug is similar to "united" in meaning; thus, FBR is translated as United Betawi Forum. The PP is a paramilitary organization created in 1959 by General Nasution. It played a key role in the anti-communist repression in 1965. During Suharto's New Order, the PP became an essential support of the authoritarian military regime. PP is known to include in its ranks a significant number of "thugs" (*preman*).

"to apply a system and laws from Islam in their entirety". It is obligatory, according to Islamic law, for the leader to declare the caliphate in all Muslim lands so as to free Muslim populations from the colonial powers of the unbelievers, and to promote the expansion of Islam to the whole world. According to HTI, since none of the presidential candidates was proposing this (rather ambitious) manifesto, members of the organization could not vote for them.[17]

Interestingly, HTI used arguments that had been employed by the candidates during the campaign. One of Prabowo's earliest messages to counter the Jokowi candidacy was that he was a "puppet candidate" (*capres boneka*) who was subservient to Megawati Soekarnoputri and her party, the PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle). HTI in turn considered Jokowi an instrument of foreign interests, such as the United States and the Vatican, and local Chinese conglomerates, and at the same time also considered Prabowo as no less of a puppet, as shown by his links to business interests from the New Order regime.[18] In fact, for HTI, all Indonesian presidents, from Soekarno to Jokowi, are considered to be or have been working for neo-colonial powers.

Thus, a FGD participant declared:

> Prabowo wears a *kopiah* (traditional hat) just as a symbol of Indonesia-ness, but he is a symbol of the old order. Who is behind Jokowi but Megawati, who outsourced our assets and jobs? My question is this one: why did Prabowo get so much support from Islamic parties? He managed to present an Islamic image, but don't be fooled, because there were other interests behind him. Are Prabowo and Jokowi really Islamic or do they just claim to be?

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[17] "Hukum Pemilu President" [Law on the Presidential election], *Al Islam*, no. 711, 20 June 2014, pp. 1–2; "Wajibkah Mengangkat Penguasa Di Negara Sekular?" [Is it Compulsory to Choose a Leader in a Secular State?], *Al-Wa'ie*, no. 164, 1 April 2014, pp. 31–33.

[18] "Islam Tegak, Pemimpin Boneka Lenyap" [Islam is Applied, Puppet Candidates Vanish], *Media Umat* 127, no. 2, May 2014, p. 9.

After the election of Jokowi, another participant stated:

> Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono or Jokowi, this is not the real problem. The real one is the leadership and the system of life (democratic or Islamic). For the presidential election in Indonesia, we say "non-participation" (*golput*), i.e. no to Jokowi and no to Prabowo, because the problem is not leadership. The more serious problem is the system of life. As long as there is a secular or democratic system in Indonesia, there is a problem. I think the democratic system is meaningless. There is only one system for the Islamic community and that is the caliphate, because it implements Islamic law.

While HTI is clearly against participation in the presidential election — as this would be equivalent to recognizing the legitimacy of the nation-state — the legislative election is viewed in a slightly different light.[19] As HTI is somewhat in competition with parties like the PKS, and because it has been accused by such parties of having "anti-democratic" tendencies, the organization has to tread carefully. HTI's speaker, Ismail Yusanto, declared in the press that the organization did not impose "non-participation" (*golput*) on its members — at least for the legislative election. Hence, for HTI, participation in the legislative election is "allowed" (*mubah*). To justify this, in terms of jurisprudence, HTI uses a hadith (HR. Abu Dawud) in which the Prophet himself allegedly legitimized having "representatives" (*wakil*). However, HTI has a set of conditions that parliamentary candidates must fulfil in order to be eligible as candidates. They have to:

1. Defend and implement laws and programmes that are in line with the Islamic ideal.
2. Come from an Islamic background and not a secular party.

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[19] "Hukum Syara' Tentang Partisipasi Dalam Pemilihan Dewan Legislatif" [Law on the Participation in the Election of the Legislative Branch], *Al Islam*, no. 700, 4 April 2014, pp. 1–4.

3. Exercise control over the government and oppose secularism.
4. Promote the expansion of Islam through proselytization.
5. Have as their purpose to "enjoin good and forbid evil" (*amar makruf nahi mungkar*).

As early as the 2004 elections, HTI had authorized its members to vote for candidates that would further promote the application of Islamic law. Greg Fealy inferred that, at that time, only a small minority exercised their right to vote.[20] It remained difficult to evaluate the participation of HTI members for the 2014 elections. During the FGD sessions, this issue appeared to make participants uneasy, and quite logically so. What is clear is that it would be challenging for HTI members to vote for any candidate from existing parties within political Islam, as these have been the target of acute criticism in HTI literature. In many ways, Islamist parties are an "obstacle" to the implementation of the caliphate.

(b) Islamist Parties: A Mere "Ornament" for Secularism

Indeed, HTI deems other existing Islamist parties to be "weak". Since they "do not have any vision or mission", they are considered to have joined hands with secular parties.[21] Moreover, HTI considers political Islam in its actual form to have failed, as shown by the fact that Islamic parties did not manage to unite in 2014 and nominate their own presidential candidate even though they had garnered 32 per cent of the vote share. Besides, using HTI's logic, even if Islamic parties were one day to become the majority in the democratic system, power would

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[20] Fealy, "Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia: Seeking a 'Total' Islamic Identity". In *Islam and Political Violence: Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West*, edited by Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), p. 159.

[21] Compared to the meta-narrative and utopian solutions of HTI, the existing Islamic parties' programmes may appear limited in their depth, but they are also more realistic in their application. The main HTI criticism for these parties seems to be that they do not (or not anymore) have the objective of establishing Islam as the sole source of political and legal authority.