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PERSPECTIVE

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Ripples from the Middle East: The Ideological Battle for the Identity of Islam in Indonesia

By Gwenael NJOTO-FEILLARD*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The expansion of ISIS in the Middle East has triggered a heated debate on the distinctiveness of Indonesian Islam. Both the authorities and major Islamic organizations have realized that the growth of radicalism in the archipelago needs to be dealt with ideologically, lest there be an importation of violence and chaos.

- The Traditionalists of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) have advanced a new expression, "*Islam Nusantara*" (Archipelagic Islam), to show that Indonesian Islam values tolerance and harmony between religious communities. The core of the argument is that Islam needs cultural contextualization. Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organization after NU, is promoting a more universal view of religion, i.e. "Progressive Islam" that is anchored into pluralism and modernity.

- Conservative and radical organizations, such as the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and the Islamic Defenders Front, have criticized the *Islam Nusantara* initiative by saying that it is deviant and attempts to "indigenize" Islam, a process that also amounts to "secularization" and "Westernization". While the arguments of the radicals are based on emotions and the customary conspiracy theories, those of NU are rooted in solid jurisprudential debates initiated by the late Abdurrahman Wahid and pursued today by NU intellectuals.

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- There is now much less complacency towards Salafism and Wahhabism both from elements of the new administration and Islamic civil society organizations, as these fundamentalist currents are now more than ever considered a possible gateway to violent radicalism.

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INTRODUCTION

In reaction to the chaos and violence that has engulfed a number of countries in the Middle East since the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), major components of Indonesian Islam have embarked on a process of self-definition and soul searching. Worried that similar inter-communal conflicts could be imported into the country, prominent figures of Indonesian Islam have started to promote more vigorously their own vision of a peaceful and tolerant religion. This endeavour started reticently in early 2014 when it became clear that ISIS was trying to extend its influence in the archipelago, which potentially constitutes its largest pool of recruits. A threshold was reached in March 2015 when the country saw in the media a video of what appeared to be Southeast Asian Malay-speaking children being trained in an ISIS military camp.[1]

While the authorities have put in place repressive measures against the terrorist organization, it appears more and more evident that the real battleground is one that is ideological, cultural and educational in nature. This is why the current debate about Indonesian Islam's cultural distinctiveness is of major importance. While the issue can be traced back to recurring debates on the so-called "Arabization" and "Indigenization" of Islam in Indonesia[2], the specific geopolitical context combined to the new national political alliances since Joko Widodo came to power has provided it with a new dimension.

A "PLURALIST ALIGNMENT" UNDER THE JOKOWI-NAHDLATUL ULAMA ALLIANCE

The election of Joko Widodo (Jokowi) to the presidency in 2014 promised a brighter future for religious tolerance and pluralism in Indonesia. After all, he had declared during the campaign that he would defend the country's tradition of moderation and inclusiveness against the patently expanding radical elements within Islam. The results of this new orientation are still not evident, however. As the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) indicated in its most recent quarterly report, there has been 14 cases of religious intolerance and injustices between April and June this year.[3] Early July, a group called the "Islamic Jihad Front" (Front Jihad Islam) broke up a Christian youth camping event near Yogyakarta. The local police, who was present and did not interfere, defended itself by stating that the organizers did not have the proper authorizations.[4] It appears, once again, that the main challenge for the central government is the capacity to apply its new policy on a local level, where some officials have been tolerating, sometimes even condoning, rights violation on religious minorities. It should be noted here that such incidents

[1] "ISIS posts footage of boy trainees from Southeast Asia", StraitsTimes.com, 17 March 2015 (http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/isis-posts-footage-of-boy-trainees-from-south-east-asia).
[2] See Martin van Bruinessen, "*Ghazwul fikri* or Arabization?", in Ken Miichi and Omar Farouk (eds), *Southeast Asian Muslims in the era of globalization*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 61-85.
[3] "KOMNAS HAM finds religious freedom still under threat", TheJakartaGlobe.com, 5 July 2015 (http://thejakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/komnas-ham-finds-religious-freedom-still-threat/).
[4] "Islamic Jihad Front disperses Christian camp in Yogyakarta", TheJakartaPost.com, 3 July 2015, (http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/07/03/islamic-jihad-front-disperses-christian-camp-yogyakarta.html).

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do not just target non-Muslims (or Muslim minority groups considered as "deviants"), as shown by the recent burning of a mosque in the Tolikara regency in Papua. On the day of "*Idul Fitri*" (17th July), celebrating the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, hundreds of native Papuans attacked reportedly non-native Papuans of Muslim faith, after inflammatory messages by the "Evangelical Church of Indonesia" (GIDI, Gereja Injili Indonesia).[5]

In Jakarta, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Lukman Hakim Syaifuddin, a known progressive figure from the Traditionalist organization Nahdlatul Ulama, has been adamant in pushing his agenda for pluralism. However, it is probable that his main instrument, the bill on Religious Harmony (RUU Kerukunan Beragama) will not be examined by Parliament in 2015 as had been previously planned. Regrettably, the Commission VII in charge of religious affairs decided that other draft laws were of greater importance, such as those regulating the pilgrimage (Hajj).[6] Evidently, conservative forces in Parliament will not make it easy for the Jokowi administration to push its agenda on pluralism. A point of contention was the recent declarations of Minister Syaifuddin during the holy month of Ramadan – expressing the idea that those who fast should respect those who do not fast (referring to the actions of radical vigilantes such as the FPI - Islamic Defenders Front, who often force food stalls to close during the fasting period).

Another recent event illustrated well the growing tensions between these two opposing poles within Indonesian Islam. On the remembrance day of Prophet Muhammad's ascension (*Isra' Mi'raj*) at the state palace in the presence of Jokowi and representatives of Muslim countries, a Qur'anic passage ("The Star", *An-Najm* 53: 1-15) was recited in Javanese and not in Arabic, which would have been the usual case. The Islamic Proselytizing Council of Indonesia (DDII, Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia), was among the many conservative and hardliners organizations that heavily criticized the move and declared that it amounted to a "liberalization" of religion.[7] The Minister of Religion was quick to point out that the decision to use this localized form of Qur'anic recitation came from himself and not the President. Undoubtedly, however, it is highly probable that it was because of Joko Widodo's personal belief in the urgent necessity to defend the values of harmony and tolerance within Indonesian Islam that the event was organized in such a symbolic place. To be sure, a Javanese recitation of the Qur'an would have been unimaginable under the previous administration, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, whose political alliances and "nationalist and religious" motto (the one of the Democrat Party) tied him to more conservative interests within the landscape of Indonesian Islam.
Jokowi is clearly not in such a position. On the contrary, since the start of the presidential campaign, a major support for him has come from the National Awakening Party (PKB, Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa), which is closely linked to the Nahdlatul Ulama, the Muslim-

[5] "Police list two GIDI members as suspects", TheJakartaPost.com, 24 July 2015 (http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/07/24/police-list-two-gidi-members-suspects.html).
[6] "Minister surprised by DPR's decision to postpone the bill on religious harmony", *SinarHarapan.com*, 13 February 2015 (http://sinarharapan.co/news/read/150213006/menag-kaget-dpr-abaikan-ruu-kerukunan-umat-beragama).
[7] "Minister of Religious Affairs will celebrate with Nusantara-style recitation of the Qur'an", Tempo.co, 18 May 2015 (http://nasional.tempo.co/read/news/2015/05/18/078667038/menteri-agama-akan-festivalkan-baca-quran-langgam-nusantara).

Traditionalist mass-organization, the largest in Indonesia. Because it has been directly challenged by the growth of neo-fundamentalist organizations such as the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) for a number of years, NU has been heralding the re-localization of Indonesian Islam against transnational puritanical movements. While this project was still limited only to some localities in recent years, especially within the Traditionalist stronghold of East Java[8], it has now become national in scale, through the Jokowi-NU alliance.

A vivid example of this new strategy by the NU leadership is the "Ayo Mondok!" movement ("Come and learn in the Pondok Pesantren!"), which is calling via new media (Twitter for example) for Indonesians to reside and learn more about Islam in the large network of Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) that are affiliated to NU. This encounter or deepening of religious principles is presented as one of the best defenses against the growth of radicalism in the country.[9] Again, the tensions between Traditionalists and fundamentalists are evident here, as the latter have accused the "Ayo Mondok!" movement of being "deviant" (*sesat*) and inspired by the much vilified current of "Liberal Islam" (JIL, Jaringan Islam Liberal), considered as being influenced and funded by the secularizing West.[10] In reality, the initiative was taken by high-ranking members of the NU leadership, with the support of the Minister of Religion himself.[11]

THE ISSUE OF "*ISLAM NUSANTARA*"

But the most notable recent initiative taken by the NU-Jokowi alliance centres around the idea of Indonesian Islam possessing a distinct identity. On June 14th, during an event at Jakarta's Great Mosque (Masjid Istiqlal), the President noted that the Middle East had descended into violence and declared: "Thanks be to God (*Alhamdulillah*), our Islam is '*Islam Nusantara*', which is full of respect, courtesy and tolerance. That is *Islam Nusantara*".[12] These few words triggered heated debates in Muslim circles. But this was not the first time that the issue had been brought to the fore in public. In the 1980s-1990s, two prominent Muslim intellectuals, Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid, who represented the two largest currents of Indonesian Islam, respectively Traditionalism and Modernism, had also reflected on the necessity of defining what Indonesian Islam is.[13] We

[8] For example, the NU leadership in Surabaya has taken steps to confront the growth of fundamentalist groups by adopting similar techniques, i.e. publishing books and creating radio stations that defend Traditionalist Islam and criticize fundamentalism. Interviews with PBNU members, Surabaya, September 2014.
[9] While some radical militants come from fundamentalist *pesantren*, it is valid to consider that those more easily influenced by these movements have very limited knowledge of Islam. In the Post-Suharto era, the growth of radical movements has been more patent in secular universities than in State Islamic Universities (UIN, Universitas Islam Negara), where progressive ideas have been developed by Muslim scholars since the 1970s.
[10] "Be careful of the heretical teachings of Ayo Mondok by the Liberal Islam Network", VOAIslam.com 8 June 2015 (http://www.voa-islam.com/read/smart-teen/2015/06/08/37484/hatihati-ajakan-sesat-ayo-mondok-oleh-jil-jaringan-islam-liberal/#sthash.dWVwAb24.dpbs).
[11] "Pesantren are the basis of religious tolerance", MetroTVnews.com, 9 June 2015 (http://news.metrotvnews.com/read/2015/06/09/403073/pesantren-basis-toleransi-beragama).
[12] "Jokowi wants NU to participate in safeguarding unity", JawaPos.com, 14 June 2015 (http://www.jawapos.com/baca/artikel/18877/jokowi-minta-nu-ikut-jaga-persatuan).
[13] See Najib Burhani, "Defining Indonesian Islam: An examination of the construction of the national Islamic identity of traditionalist and modernist Muslims" in Jajat Burhanudin and Kees van Dijk (eds.), *Islam in Indonesia: Contrasting Images and Interpretations*, Amsterdam University Press, 2013, p. 25-47.

find nowadays the same dichotomy between traditionalism and modernism as before: while NU sees the cultural localization of Indonesian Islam as a major strategy in resisting the expansion of transnational fundamentalism in the archipelago, Muhammadiyah prefers to focus on an Islam that is open to modernity of a universal and global nature through the notion of a "Progressive Islam" (*Islam Berkemajuan*).[14] However, the difference is that today the debate is emanating from the highest spheres of State power, which shows the sense of urgency around the issue that have appeared since the rise of ISIS.

In NU circles, nationalism is clearly a major pillar of *Islam Nusantara*, as opposed to the transnationalist goals of the caliphate. After a meeting of the highest-ranking NU Ulamas in 2014 and a national conference of the NU leadership, the organization – for the first time – officially declared its opposition to Hizbut Tahrir's objective of building a global caliphate.[15] Additionally, the Traditionalists are now more than ever targeting Wahhabism and Salafism, against which *Islam Nusantara* is supposed to constitute the best defense. Although neither currents aim at building a transnational caliphate, they are considered by Traditionalists to be preparing a fertile ground for extremism to grow in Indonesia. NU chairman Said Aqil Siraj recently declared that this "shallow Islam" from the Middle East has used the oil rent to propagate its message. The key therefore is not only to anchor *Islam Nusantara*, but also to make Indonesia prosperous for the extremist message to die down.

It should be noted that for NU, *Islam Nusantara* is far from being an empty slogan. There are now scholars who put significant effort into defining the tenets of this concept through an Islamic jurisprudential method (*fiqh*). The NU leadership also announced that it will propagate the *Islam Nusantara* ideal through education in its 24 universities, and through its many connections with political parties. NU-related student organizations, have constituted "Islam Nusantara Students Committees", declaring that they would oppose by all means the growth of ISIS in Indonesia.[16] In Jombang, the cradle of NU, the government is financing the creation of an "Islam Nusantara Museum" (to date more than 2 million USD have been attributed to the project).[17] Last but not least, *Islam Nusantara* has been established as the main theme of NU's five-yearly congress in Jombang, East Java (1-5 August 2015).

A number of intellectuals have weighed in on the issue as well. Sarlito Wirawan Sarwono, professor at Universitas Indonesia Psychology Department notes that the Arabization of Indonesian Islam has been on the rise over the last two decades.[18] Eminent Islamic scholar and Muhammadiyah intellectual Amin Abdullah sees the traditional horizontal segmentation of societies in the Middle East as the major problem in the sense that conflict stems from the

[14] "Pushing for the Enlightening movement", Kompas.com, 5 June 2015 (http://print.kompas.com/baca/2015/06/05/Dorong-Gerakan-Pencerahan?utm_source=bacajuga).
[15] "NU and Islam Nusantara", Arrahmah.co.id (http://www.arrahmah.co.id/islam-indonesia/nu-dan-islam-nusantara-2-12779).
[16] "Islam Nusantara Students oppose ISIS in Indonesia", PosKotaNews.com, 28 March 2015 (http://poskotanews.com/2015/03/28/mahasiswa-islam-nusantara-tolak-isis-di-indonesia/).
[17] "Government building an Islam Nusantara Museum in Jombang", Kompas.com, 27 May 2015 (http://regional.kompas.com/read/2015/05/27/08523711/Pemerintah.Bangun.Museum.Islam.Nusantara.di.Jombang).
[18] "Islam Nusantara", KoranSindo.com, 21 June 2015 (http://www.koran-sindo.com/read/1015104/149/islam-nusantara-1434856580).

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solidarity between tribes, sects and other groupings, that are antithetical to the sound nation building process that Indonesia needs and has applied for decades.[19] Another issue is the "*takfir*", the practice of declaring a fellow Muslim an apostate, which is now rife in the Middle East and that Indonesia should guard itself against. For Abdullah, there is a need for a "contextual theology" in Indonesia, through the help of humanities and social sciences. Najib Burhani, a LIPI[20] researcher and Muhammadiyah intellectual, sees Islam Nusantara not only as a reaction to the growing violence in the Middle East but also as a response to globalization and, in the process, amounts to an "indigenization" of Islam. Burhani suggests that such an orientation is understandable given the circumstances, but warns that it should not tend towards parochialization and sectarianism.

Other figures have been less adamant on the re-localization of Indonesian Islam, such as Haedar Nashir, another Muhammadiyah intellectual[21], who sees in this process a danger of manipulation similar to the strategies of de-radicalization during the New Order.[22] Faisal Islam, a professor at the Yogyakarta Islamic State University, stresses that Islam cannot be limited to a country or a culture, as it is the embodiment of God's transcendental nature. He also affirms that local mysticism, such as the one defended by NU circles, cannot be integrated to the Islamic dogma. According to him, the rise of violence in the Middle East is not due to Islam but to certain groups of Muslims.[23]

CONSERVATIVE AND RADICAL OPPOSITION TO "*ISLAM NUSANTARA*"

Other forces within Indonesian Islam have voiced their own arguments against *Islam Nusantara* in a more uncompromising way. The main argument is that "Islam is One" and cannot be divided into "boxes". This illustrates the typically transnational utopian nature of Islamist and fundamentalist forces, which ideates that there is no Arabic Islam and therefore no Indonesian Islam. Islam is universal in its nature: "Muslims are a brotherhood. They have the same God, the same Prophet, the same Kaaba. They are like one body, formed from Indonesians and non-Indonesians alike."[24] Another argument is that if there is an Indonesian Islam, then there should also be an effort of definition of Javanese Islam, Sundanese Islam, Sumatran Islam, etc. In reality, according to this line of thought, Islam, since it was announced by the Prophet, was never given any characterization, in the likes of "Nusantara".[25] Moreover, Felix Siau, an Indonesian-Chinese convert to Islam and media savvy preacher with close links to HTI, points out that Indonesia's nine semi-mythical

[19] http://civicislam.blogspot.fr/2015/06/prof-amin-abdullah-pemikiran-islam.html?m=1
[20] Indonesian Institute for Sciences (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia).
[21] He has since been nominated to lead the Muhammadiyah (early August 2015).
[22] "Pushing for the Enlightening movement", Kompas.com, 5 June 2015 (http://print.kompas.com/baca/2015/06/05/Dorong-Gerakan-Pencerahan?utm_source=bacajuga).
[23] "On the issue of Islam Nusantara", SindoNews.com, 1st July 2015 (http://nasional.sindonews.com/read/1018749/18/menyoal-islam-nusantara-1435717482/1).
[24] "Indonesian Islam, an absurd idea", Hidayatullah.com, 28 May 2015 (http://www.hidayatullah.com/artikel/opini/read/2015/05/28/70531/islam-indonesia-sebuah-ide-yang-absurd.html
[25] "Deconstructing the logic of Islam Nusantara", Hidayatullah, 2 July 2015 (http://www.hidayatullah.com/artikel/ghazwul-fikr/read/2015/07/02/73453/menguak-logika-islam-nusantara.html).

Muslim saints (*Wali Songo*) "Islamized Nusantara" and did not "Nusantarized Islam" as the proponents of *Islam Nusantara* supposedly want to do now.

The neo-fundamentalist organization Hidayatullah's internet site has criticized the concept as an "intellectual construction" that brings confusion to the minds of non-initiated people (*orang awam*) and make them stray from the path (*menyesatkan*). Hidayatullah also points out that *Islam Nusantara*'s local mystical components as purportedly defended by NU cannot be considered Islamic. It represents the so-called "*Aliran*" movement that is full of animistic and pantheistic beliefs.[26] Recently, the term "JIN" has been used to characterize the movement initiated by NU circles, as in "*Jemaah Islam Nusantara*" (Community of Islam Nusantara), in reference to the Arabic word "Jin" or "spirit", therefore insisting on its mystical and deviating nature.

The effort of re-localization by Traditionalists has also been defined as having racist overtones for targeting Arabic culture, which should be valued because it has been the vehicle for Islamization in the region.[27] Even further, in this Traditionalist logic, Didin Hafiduddin of the Indonesian Council for Islamic Proselytization (DDII, Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah) sees a real danger in it being more than a mere "de-Arabization", but also as a process of "Westernization" that will end in "secularization" and "liberalization" (of morality). It is as if Islam should bow to Nusantara, he affirms.[28]

Habib Rizieq, the leader of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam), has been the most vocal in criticising the *Islam Nusantara* movement: he sees it as the extension of the so-called "Sepilis" current (a rather explicit acronym of "Secularism, Pluralism, and Liberalism") and reminds the public that these three notions had been condemned by a MUI fatwa in in 2005. For Rizieq, *Islam Nusantara* is no different, except that it introduces a cultural and nationalistic aspect to "trick" the Indonesian population. The object of the JIN movement is to impose indigenous cultural values (*pribumisasi*) on an innately universal Islam. In short, for Rizieq, what *Islam Nusantara* is doing is "trying to get rid of the Qur'an". and thus it should be considered as "an enemy of Islam", that "deviates and makes other stray from the right path" (*sesat dan menyesatkan*). As such, according to him, it is obligatory for Muslims to reject the *Islam Nusantara* movement and come back to the "right path" of Islamic orthodoxy.[29]

NU as the main initiator of the *Islam Nusantara* movement and therefore the target of these various arguments has not left the attacks unanswered. In its various media it has undertaken

[26] "Islam Nusantara: The Islamization of Nusantara or the Nusantarization of Islam?", Hidayatullah.com, 26 May 2015 (http://www.hidayatullah.com/artikel/ghazwul-fikr/read/2015/05/26/70339/islam-nusantara-islamisasi-nusantara-atau-menusantarakan-islam-1.html).
[27] "The Islam Nusantara program appeared because of misperceptions", Hidayatullah.com, 13 June 2015 (http://www.hidayatullah.com/berita/nasional/read/2015/06/13/71997/miumi-program-islam-nusantara-muncul-karena-mispersepsi.html).
[28] "KH. Didin: Islam Nusantara is dangerous", Inilah.com, 30 June 2015 (http://mozaik.inilah.com/read/detail/2218156/kh-didin-islam-nusantara-itu-membahayakan).
[29] "JIN: a movement that is heretical and leads astray", SuaraIslam.com, 16 June 2015 (http://www.suara-islam.com/read/index/14628).

the task of demonstrating point-by-point, that its initiative has nothing to do with so-called de-Arabization, Westernization or secularization, but with the necessity of a geographical and chronological contextualization of Islam. According to this line of thought, while there are indeed aspects of Islam that are universal and immovable (the Qur'an and Hadiths), there are also large aspects of the practice that need interpretation (*ijtihad*). "*Islam Nusantara*" is thus understood as the product of a dynamic interaction between jurisprudence of social relations (*fiqih mu'amalah*), the understanding of Islam's core texts (*nash*), Islamic law (*syari'at*), customs ('*urf*), culture and the reality of the land of Nusantara.[30]

While NU clearly sees the re-localization of Indonesian Islam as being central to its strategy, Muhammadiyah is less adamant on this process. To be sure, the modernist organization is no less attached to Indonesian nationalism, but also to a more universal form of Islam, one that signifies entry into "modernity". In this sense, compared to NU, Muhammadiyah could appear closer to the puritanical orientation of some fundamentalist movements. This sensitive issue has been taken up by the Head of the National Police, Badrodin Haiti, himself from a Muhammadiyah family, who candidly said during a conference that some teachings of the organization could be used by radical movements and that Muhammadiyah needed to act on this.[31] Din Syamsuddin, the head of the organization for 2010-2015, has made clear that he is in favor of pluralism and tolerance. Hence, the main theme of Muhammadiyah's five-yearly congress (3-7 August 2015) will cover the issue of "Progressive Islam" and the need for a "revitalization of religion".

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A decade after operating what has been called a "conservative turn"[32], NU and Muhammadiyah seem to have realized the urgency of countering ideologically the expansion of extremism. Their respective new leadership, nominated during the recent national congresses, will determine how far this path will be taken. Here, Haedar Nashir's appointment to the Muhammadiyah leadership can be viewed as a positive development. A few days after his nomination, he declared that the Modernist organization needed to do more to protect religious minorities.[33] It should also be noted that moderate figures dominate Muhammadiyah's new leadership board (2015-2020), with only two members (out of thirteen) coming from the conservative side.[34]

[30] "The significance of Islam Nusantara", NU.or.id, (http://www.nu.or.id/a,public-m,dinamic-s,detail-ids,4-id,60458-lang,id-c,kolom-t,Maksud+Istilah+Islam+Nusantara-.phpx).
[31] "National Police asks Muhammadiyah to break the postulates of radicalism", Kompas.com, 6 July 2015 (http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/07/06/03140041/Kapolri.Minta.Muhammadiyah.Patahkan.Dalil.Radikalisme).
[32] Martin van Bruinessen (ed.), *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the Conservative Turn*, Singapore, ISEAS, 2013.
[33] "Muhammadiyah should do more to protect religious minorities", TheJakartaGlobe.com, 7 August 2015 (http://thejakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/muhammadiyah-should-do-more-to-protect-religious-minorities-new-chief/)
[34] http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/06/moderates-rule-muhammadiyah-board.html

NU's case is more complex. The position of "Supreme Authority" (*Rois A'am*) has been attributed to KH. Ma'aruf Amin, a known conservative figure, thus replacing KH. Mustofa Bisri, who is probably amongst the most progressive high ranking religious authority within NU. However, Ma'aruf Amin has declared after his nomination that he was in favor of the *Islam Nusantara* initiative and that tolerance between religious and ethnic groups needed to be reinforced in Indonesia.[35] Additionally, the position of executive director, the second most important one in the organization, has been attributed once again to KH. Said Aqil Siroj who is known to have little sympathy for Wahhabi fundamentalism and who has pushed for NU's recent communication campaign against extremism.

It appears more evident now that lenience, both on the part of the authorities and "Civil Islam" towards radicalism has significantly decreased. Salafism and Wahhabism, though not directly promoting terrorism, are considered more and more as a potential gateway to violence and intolerance between religious communities, which might endanger the country's national integrity. In this sense, the moderates are taking on the battle of ideas by publically reaffirming their values. This, in itself, is a notable development for Indonesia and will constitute an important advantage for the Jokowi administration in its efforts to tackle the growth of radicalism in the country.

It will indeed be needed at a moment when countries like Saudi Arabia are actively promoting their exclusivist and rigorist interpretation of Islam through extensive funding mechanisms in different parts of the Muslim world, Indonesia included, as has been clearly shown by the recent leak of Saudi diplomatic cables.[36]

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[35] Kompas.com, 8 August, 2015 (http://print.kompas.com/baca/2015/08/08/Islam-Nusantara-sebagai-Pola-Perilaku)

[36] In recent years, the Saudi government has actively lobbied the Indonesian authorities and religious institutions such as MUI to counter the growth of the Ahmadiyya, which is considered deviant by Wahhabis. "WikiLeaks: Saudi Arabia is active in stopping the spread of Ahmadiyya in Indonesia, Republika.co.id, 12 July 2015 (http://www.republika.co.id/berita/internasional/timur-tengah/15/07/12/nrdmy1-wikileaks-arab-saudi-berperan-setop-penyebaran-ahmadiyah-di-indonesia).