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LASKAR JIHAD IN MALUKU 2000-2002

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LASKAR JIHAD IN MALUKU 2000-2002: A COLLECTIVE OBLIGATION*

Sitti Sani Nurhayati**

Abstract

Tulisan ini menjelaskan salah satu kelompok Islam yang dalam beberapa hal dikaitkan dengan terorisme di Indonesia, yaitu Laskar Jihad (LJ). Ia merupakan bagian kelompok militan yang terlibat dalam konflik sektarian di Ambon dan Poso di era 1990-an. LJ didirikan pada bulan Januari 2000 sebagai respon ketidakmampuan pemerintah Indonesia dalam mengatasi konflik di Ambon. Kelompok ini juga tampil ke muka seiring dengan munculnya era keterbukaan kebebasan politik saat itu.

Kajian dalam tulisan ini menemukan bahwa LJ secara esensial lebih merupakan respon internal umat Islam Indonesia terhadap konflik yang tengah berlangsung, daripada merupakan bagian dari gerakan jihad internasional. Oleh karena itu, kecurigaan tentang keterkaitannya dengan al-Qaeda merupakan hal yang tidak beralasan. Pada kenyataannya, LJ adalah produk yang lahir dari kondisi spesifik di Indonesia serta ketidakmampuan pemerintah dalam mengatasi konflik keagamaan.

Keywords: *Laskar Jihad, Jihad, Terrorism, Conflicts, Violence.*

THIS paper focuses on *Laskar Jihad* (LJ)'s faith on jihad and specific domestic background in which the group came forward.

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Looking closer at the Indonesian political contexts in which LJ has emerged, this paper argued that the motives behind the group's action in Maluku 2000-2002 were based on LJ's understanding on jihad as a collective obligation. However, LJ would not have resurfaced without a complex mixture of Indonesian political circumstances. This article looks at academic debates on LJ and global terrorist networks, the group's organizational structure, a brief historical background on the Maluku conflicts and the government's responses, as well as the specific domestic political contexts in which the group emerged. The challenge posed by *Laskar Jihad's* paramilitary and ideological agenda may encompass more than Ambon and Poso. However, despite the alleged ties to regional and global terrorist networks, the organization's threat is neither equal to nor linked with international terrorism.

Historical Background of the Maluku Conflict 1999-2002

Many experts argue that the moderate calls for Jihad in Maluku indicate that *Laskar Jihad* successfully turned the communal conflict into a religious one.¹ Closer analysis of the underlying causes of the violence, however, reveals that the Ambon conflict was a social conflict rather than a religious one, manipulated by local actors for their own gains.²

In fact, its roots lie in the social engineering undertaken by the Dutch when they set foot on the Maluku islands some 350 years ago.³ The introduction of a new power balance and Protestant Calvinism resulted in Christian-Muslim competition

¹Davis, "Laskar...", 12-32, Hasan, "Faith...", 145-169.

²For a fuller detail, see Klinken, "Wars...", 1-26.

³For a fuller account on the Mollucan history, see Evert van Imhoff, Gijs Beets, Corina Huisman, "Indische Nederlanders 1930-2001: een demografische reconstructie", *Bevolking en Gezin*, No. 32, (Hamburg: 2003), 85-124.

and, to a lesser extent, Catholic-Protestant competition.⁴ In Ambon, the Catholic community soon became Protestant and Protestants soon comprised the majority of the population. They became the local partners of the Dutch-East Indies spice traders and colonial administrators. Thus, comparatively speaking, Christians received the more fertile lands, better education, employment in the civil service, and positions in the colonial army.⁵ Indeed, relations between Ambon's Protestants and the Dutch colonial administration were so good that many Ambonese fought on the Dutch side in Indonesia's war of independence, and at the end of the independence war they opted for their own republic—Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS) or Republic of South Maluku. This historical legacy illustrates the seed for Muslim-Christians competition and the continued distrust of Ambon's Christians in the eye of Indonesians.⁶

From the Christians' perspective, most regarded RMS as a passing phenomenon.⁷ Their educational advantage allowed them to continue to dominate the civil service, the education system, and the media.⁸ It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that their position started to erode for several reasons. First, the educational gap was beginning to narrow. Ambonese Muslims entered universities and eventually competed for the civil

⁴Tim Peneliti LIPI, *Bara Dalam Sekam: Identifikasi akar masalah dan solusi atas konflik lokal di Aceh, Maluku, Papua, dan Riau*, (Bandung: Mizan in collaboration with Tim Peneliti LIPI and Kantor Menristek RI, 2001), 20-32.

⁵van Imhoff, "Indische...", 85-124.

⁶Jaap Timmer, "Conflict and Anthropology: Some Notes on Doing Consultancy Work in Maluku Battleground (Eastern Indonesia)", paper presented in the *Fifth European Society for Oceanists Conference*, Vienna, (Canberra: RSPAS ANU, 2002), pp. 1-15.

⁷For a different perspective, see Rustam Kastor, *Suara Maluku Membantah Rustam Kastor Menjawab*, (Yogyakarta: Wihdah Press, 2000), also Thalib, "Declaration of War", 2002.

⁸Interview, 2005.

service, education, and media—jobs that the Christians had for so long considered theirs.⁹ Second, on the back of Soeharto's transmigration program, a significant number of migrants from neighbouring Sulawesi arrived in Ambon and found their position mainly in the informal sectors such as business and trade.¹⁰ The Christians perceived these migrants, together with local Muslims, as a demographic threat.¹¹

By the early 1990s, it was only in the government and the police that local Christians still enjoyed an advantage over Muslims. Finally, Soeharto's improved relations with Islam created the perception that the government was pursuing an Islamisation policy.¹² His successor, BJ Habibie who had been the chairperson of ICMI (the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association), strengthened this belief. Not surprisingly, Ambon's Christians started to feel squeezed from all directions. They felt their sacrifice of giving up RMS was never truly appreciated.¹³ They were fed rumours of "Christian persecution," feared their loss of hegemony, and were encouraged by the anarchy that had engulfed Indonesia since the fall of Soeharto. They finally lashed out on 19 January 1999.¹⁴ Therefore, at least in the very beginning, a sense of religious superiority or grand design to destroy Islam, as Ja'far Umar argued, did not drive the Maluku

⁹Interview, 2005.

¹⁰ S. Sinansari Ecip, *Menyulut Ambon, Kronologi Merambatnya Berbagai Kerusuhan Lintas Wilayah di Indonesia*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1999), 20-45, Klinken, "Wars...", 2-8.

¹¹Interview, 2005.

¹²Ahmad, Kasman Hi, and Herman Oesman (eds), *Tragedi Bumi Seribu Pulau: Mengkritisi Kebijakan Pemerintah dan Solusi Penyelesaian Konflik*, (Jakarta: Gubuk Kajian Mutiara Nasional, 2000), 20-27.

¹³Interview with Drs. H.M. Taufik, MA, the former lecturer at IAIN Maluku, Mataram, September 2005.

¹⁴A minor quarrel between a Christian driver and a Muslim passenger in January 1999 precipitated the beginning of the conflicts, for a fuller detail see S. Sinansari Ecip, *Menyulut...*, 1-28

conflicts. Rather, Christians were afraid of losing their social position and their share of resources.

Garry van Klinken noted that new elites from both sides—Muslim and Christian—emerged during the conflicts and enjoyed an authority and privileges that have never existed before.¹⁵ Sadly, however, as the Maluku conflict escalated, these local elites discovered that it was easier to mobilise large followings by portraying the conflict in religious terms, rather than as a political and economic struggle.¹⁶ The resulting communalisation of the violence was, of course, not an entirely empty invention.¹⁷ As described above, the tensions between Christian and Muslims have been existed long before the conflict mounted, and both sides had their own ‘holy fighters’.

“There were Christian Jihadis or Christian holy war fighters, who really were just like some of the hard-line Islamist groups, who were using religion as a cloak to advance political, economic in some instances, as well as religious interests. They engaged in violence...that was truly horrific, and when publicised in the media, needless to say, put wind in the sails of groups like the *Laskar Jihad*, who were able to assert that this required a strong response from Muslim organisations since the government was not acting.”¹⁸ “We pray first and then there are only two options—to die or to kill the enemy.”¹⁹

Nevertheless, the moderate call on jihad at the national level does not necessarily mean *Laskar Jihad* successfully turned a communal conflict into a religious war. For instance, Amien Rais, one of those moderates who called for jihad in Maluku,

¹⁵See Klinken, “Wars...”, 5-12.

¹⁶For a local perspective check Thamrin Husain Zairin and Salampessy, *Ketika Semerbak Cengkih Tergusur Asap Mesiu; tragedy kemanusiaan maluku dibalik konspirasi militer, kapitalis birokrat, dan kepentingan elit politik*, (Jakarta: Sekretariat Tapak Ambon, 2001), 20-31.

¹⁷Tim Peneliti LIPI, *Bara...*, 20-31.

¹⁸Hefner, “Islam...”, 17-20.

¹⁹Melkianus Yusuf Tuhumury, the leader of the Christian militias in Maluku.

was the leader of Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organisation known for its moderate and secular ideas.²⁰ Amien Rais founded an inclusive party, PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional) that participated in the 1999 elections. It would be more beneficial for him if the threat to Muslims in the Maluku was exaggerated—to take a neutral stance and would eventually lead PAN to attract more voters that were non-Muslim.²¹

It is noteworthy to consider how traditionalist Islam and the nationalists saw the conflicts. Wahid, President at the time and the central figure in NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) seemed to have been reluctant to spend political capital on attempts to resolve the Maluku conflicts.²² The contribution of the Wahid government was confined to fleeting visits to the Maluku by the president and his deputy, Megawati (the leader of PDI, the nationalist party) who was personally charged with bringing about an end to the fighting. Despite her claims to have been working energetically behind the scenes, Megawati devoted little attention to the Maluku as fighting in the islands erupted once more.²³

²⁰Rais's rejection to the implementation of Shari'a is one example. The US ambassador for Indonesia concerning the Baasyir case approached its current leader, Syafii Maarif, see "Ba'asyir nonviolent: Muhammadiyah chief", *The Jakarta Post*, 14 January 2005.

²¹It is noteworthy to consider the minimum gain of Islamic parties in every national election as a reminder of the fact that religious issues have never been a decisive factor in directing Indonesian Muslims voters. Indeed, most of PAN voters come from the Muhammadiyah community are regarded as modernists and the majority of its members are better-educated Muslims (as far as Indonesian Muslims educational background is concerned). With its modernist stance, it has been argued that it is difficult for Muhammadiyah to secure votes from traditional Muslim groups such as NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) or the nationalist group such as the PDI (the Indonesian Democratic Party) led by Megawati.

²²Davis, "Laskar...", 12-32.

²³"Megawati defends record on Mollucas", *BBC News*, BBC, 9 January 2000, available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/596369.stm>, consulted, 20 October, 2005.

Megawati stated “community members themselves have to feel that it is their own responsibility (to find peace)”.²⁴ Regardless the fact that many PDI vote come from nationalist and Christian voters—the majority of whom resided in the eastern part of Indonesia including the Maluku region—Megawati enjoyed few complaints from her party.²⁵

Thus, it would be futile for moderates like Amien Rais to secure votes from both the traditionalist and the nationalist voters with a call for jihad in Maluku. The moderate calls for jihad merely illustrated the inability of the government to manage the conflicts and the imbalance power in Maluku in favour of Christians.²⁶ As soon as the peace agreement was reached, these moderate Muslims asked *Laskar Jihad* to withdraw from the conflict areas. It is best, consequently, to see the crisis in the Maluku not as something that resulted from a general trend of radicalisation in Muslim society, but a breakdown in governance that was manipulated by local actors for their own goals.²⁷

²⁴“Megawati defends record on Mollucas”, *BBC News*. It seems that Megawati learnt from her experience of losing presidential bid from Wahid in 1999 partly because her political opponents used her syncretic background and accused her as ‘not-truly’ Islamic. On the other side, the majority of her party’s supporters are nationalists and Christians. Since the conflict in Maluku involved the Islamic and Christian groups, Megawati caught in the middle of ensuring her statement of not hurting both sides.

²⁵It is still unclear as to why Mega enjoyed mild complaint from her party. Though, the government apathy, according to Schulze, was largely due to the remoteness of the conflict from the capital. Jones and M. Taufik, however, rejected if Maluku is classified as a remote area with marginal contribution to the national capital, interviews September 2005.

²⁶ Muslims are outnumbered by Christians in the city of Ambon (Maluku’s capital), and as Hefner mentioned before, the Christian holy fighters were formed prior to *Laskar Jihad*, Hefner, “Islam ...”, 24.

²⁷Interview with Fealy, 2005.

***Laskar Jihad's* Organizational Structure**

In January 2000, *Laskar Jihad* was established in response to the government's inability to resolve the conflict in Ambon and protect Ambonese Muslims from Christian's attacks. *Laskar Jihad*, however, did not make a real impact on this conflict and indeed Indonesian politics until the following April, when Ja'far Umar Thalib went to meet President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) to plead their case.²⁸ Despite Gus Dur's objections, an estimated 3,000 mujahidin departed for Ambon.

Laskar Jihad's commander, Ustadz Ja'far Umar Thalib, is 43 years old, born in Malang of Arab-Madurese descent. The grandson of a Yemeni trader, his formative experiences include fighting with the Afghan Mujahidin in 1988-1989 and studying in the Mawdudi Institute in Lahore, Pakistan.²⁹

Laskar Jihad follows the Salafi tradition, or *assalafushalih*, which seeks the revival of the lifestyle based upon the way of the Prophet Muhammad and the four righteous Caliphs. Its ideology is clearly conservative as reflected in its view on women, democracy, and the West. *Laskar Jihad* rejects democracy as 'incompatible' with Islam and refuses to support any political

²⁸ "Six Representatives of the Jihad Paramilitary Troops Meet the President", *Kompas*, 7 April 2000.

²⁹ Ja'far Umar Thalib completed his early education at *Pesantren* Islamic Boarding School) al-Irsyad, Malang. In 1983 he went to Jakarta to continue his studies at LIPIA (*Lembaga Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab*/ Institution for the study of Islam and Arab), and became a leader of the student organisation of the al-Irsyad. In 1986 he had an opportunity to continue his study at the Maududi Islamic Institute in Peshawar, Pakistan under the scholarship from the US and Saudi Arabian governments. Before going back to Indonesia in 1987, Ja'far Umar Thalib joined *mujahidin* who were waging war against Soviet Union. In this war, Ja'far met with experienced Muslims fighters from around the world, including Osama bin Laden. Undoubtedly, Afghanistan provided Ja'far with a particular understanding of jihad and *Ukhuwah Islamiyyah* (Islamic Brotherhood). These two main points dominated his idea of the Mollucan jihad.

party, including the more Islamist parties. According to Ja'far, "In democracy, people who don't understand anything, and they are the majority, elect their leaders without any educated considerations at all. They only elect those that give them money or say what they want to hear."³⁰ In a genuine Islamic society, it is God's law rather than the will of the people that is supreme.

Its attitudes to women also place it outside the mainstream of Indonesian Muslims, as women are not permitted to join *Laskar Jihad*. For Ja'far, their main responsibility to women is "to educate them and then marry them to pious men who are capable of preventing them from falling into sin".³¹ Men are to supervise women and ensure that their behaviour is properly Islamic. The group's attitude to the West, the US in particular, follows the theory that the US and Israel are leading a worldwide conspiracy to destroy Islam.

Laskar Jihad's members are generally aged between 17-40 years, dress in Arabic robes and headwear, and grow long beards. The group maintains that its apparel is the same as worn by the prophet Muhammad. *Laskar Jihad* members are from a broad cross-section of society including students, graduates, and business people; many are educated with young families, but some are homeless and extremely poor.³² The fact that many of its members come from an educated class, has enabled *Laskar Jihad* to provide a variety of humanitarian aid to Muslims in Maluku during the conflicts such as doctors and teachers.

Its main branch, the FKAWJ, has a relatively modern organisational structure. It has a central executive board, whose headquarters are located in Yogyakarta. Ayip Syafruddin, leads this executive board. A secretary, Marah Bahun, an engineer

³⁰Jacqui Baker, *Laskar Jihad dan Mobilisasi Umat Islam dalam Konflik Maluku*, Murdoch University, Perth, 2001.

³¹Greg Fealy, "Inside the *Laskar Jihad*", IRP News, (Melbourne: *Inside Indonesia*, No 65, 2001), 1-3.

³²Fealy "Laskar ...", 1-2.

from Haluoleo University Southeast Sulawesi, assists him.³³ The executive board has a number of divisions, each led by a divisional leader, the majority of whom are university graduates. This central executive board supervises provincial and district branches. Provincial branches have spread in twenty-four provinces of Indonesia. Each provincial branch has a number of district sub-branches.³⁴ The FKAWJ is controlled by a 60-member board of patrons (Dewan pembina), chaired by Ja'far. Most board members are leaders of Pesantren or prominent preachers and their followers form the core of the *Laskar Jihad*.³⁵

The FKAWJ has spread far from its humble roots in Central Java, boasting 70 branches across Indonesia in 2001.³⁶ FKAWJ has eight divisions; public relations, advocacy; funding, economic development, education, social matters, health, and then the paramilitary wing-*Laskar Jihad*. Ja'far Umar Thalib is the Chairman of FKAWJ also served as the *Laskar Jihad's* commander.³⁷

It is known that the Maluku conflicts were the motive behind LJ's formation in 2000, and the group considered its involvement in Maluku as jihad.³⁸ It is important, therefore, to consider LJ's interpretation of jihad.

***Laskar Jihad* and International Terrorist Links**

Laskar Jihad is one of the militias formed to fight in the sectarian conflicts in Ambon and Poso from the late 1990s.

³³Noorhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics: The Rise of *Laskar Jihad* in the era of transition in Indonesia", *Indonesia*, Vol. 73, 2002, pp. 145-169. For more detail on Ja'far see Marshall, "Profile...".

³⁴Interview, 2005.

³⁵Fealy "Laskar ...", 2.

³⁶Jacqui Baker, *Laskar...*, 26

³⁷Interview, 2005.

³⁸Ja'far Umar Thalib, "Declaration of War", *Radio Suara Perjuangan Maluku*, Maluku, 2002.

Laskar Jihad's international connections have come under increased scrutiny since the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The most obvious and worrying link from an international perspective is that with Afghanistan. Zachary Abuza has observed that Ja'far Umar Thalib—the *Laskar Jihad* Commander—is the member of Group of 272 returned veterans and, moreover, that the key leaders of radical groups in the region all are veterans of the Mujahidin.³⁹

According to Abuza, *Laskar Jihad* is one of the best examples of al-Qaeda's influence and its ability to find common cause, because seven Afghans arrived in Maluku in July 2000. He argues:

“There is increasingly evidence that Ja'far's assertion that the group is a home-grown, locally funded movement is a sheer lie, and that his organisation exists because of covert aid from Islamists outside of Indonesia and the al-Qaeda network.”⁴⁰

In September 2000, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Osama bin Laden had established ties with Muslim radicals responsible for attacks on Christians in the Molluccan islands. The report quoted “Western intelligence sources saying that al-Qaeda has regular contacts with at least one leader of the *Laskar Jihad*”.⁴¹ Similarly, the *New York Times* published an article detailing the connection between the activities of Ja'far Umar Thalib and the activities of Osama bin Laden, and suggested that

³⁹For a contemporary analysis on Southeast Asian groups and their possible links with international terrorist networks see Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror*, (London: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

⁴⁰ Abuza argues that LJ is not going to relinquish this critical infrastructure even if it disbands some of its paramilitary forces. It will lay low, rename itself, and reemerge, bringing jihad, intolerance, and sectarian violence, *Ibid*, 27.

⁴¹“Muslim Army Trains for Holy War”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 April, 2000.

like bin Laden, Ja'far is also a threat to American national security.⁴² Quoting what it described as "American and Asian Officials", The *New York Times* explained its allegation:

"For the last two years, Osama bin Laden has been working to establish a beachhead here in the world's most-populous Muslim nation,...Members of his organisation al-Qaeda have slipped in and out of the archipelago, bringing millions of dollars in cash for radical Islamic organisations, recruiting members, and providing military training... If a terrorist cell could operate in rigidly controlled Singapore, al-Qaeda may have achieved in the disarray of Indonesia considered one of the most fertile havens in the world for international terrorists."⁴³

In a long article, the *New York Times* concluded that Ja'far has a lot of power and influence, and controls between 3.000-10.000 armed, trained, and loyal fighters.⁴⁴ It went on to suggest the U.S. government should not take Ja'far lightly. Collectively, it further suggested that the U.S. government must take Ja'far seriously because he is "as dangerous as Osama bin Laden".⁴⁵ Although Ja'far claims ideological differences from Osama, the article argued that these differences were minimal.⁴⁶

Peter Chalk described *Laskar Jihad* as 'the most visible threat in terms of global Islamic extremism and links to al-Qaeda'.⁴⁷

⁴²"The Challenge for Moderate Islam", *The Economist*, 20 June 2000, and Andrew Marshall, "Profile: Ja'far Umar Thalib", *The New York Times*, 9 May 2002.

⁴³"Jihad Forces Struggle to Shed Militant Image", *The Jakarta Post*, 10 November 2000, also Marshall, "Profile...".

⁴⁴"More than 55,000 homes destroyed in Indonesia unrest", *The Jakarta Post*, Jakarta, 17 June 2000, also Marshall, "Profile...".

⁴⁵Kathy Marks, "Thousand of Muslim fighters bound for Mollucas", *The Independent*, London, 8 May 2000, Ressa, "Al-Qaeda behind Ambon and other conflicts", *CNN*, 9 May 2002.

⁴⁶"Indonesia's Terror Islands", *Newsweek*, 12 February 2001.

⁴⁷Peter Chalk, "Pan-Islamic Extremism in Southeast Asia: The Role of Jemaah Islamiyya", *MIPT Yearbook*, (2002), 12-16.

He claimed that the most fearful threat is the indication that *Laskar Jihad* has established links with al-Qaeda.⁴⁸ These analyses are consistent with the 'links' allegations of international and regional approaches in the terrorism studies, which have cited the locus of sectarian conflicts in Indonesia as the breeding ground for a new generation of al-Qaeda-type terrorist activity inspired by notions of a pan-Southeast Asian Islamic state.⁴⁹

The above accounts do not deny that contacts among groups such as MILF as well as al-Qaeda and *Laskar Jihad* may have occurred. Nevertheless, some experts argue that to focus on these contacts alone is to misrepresent the nature of these groups in terms of their mission, grievances, and strategies.⁵⁰ Robert Hefner, for instance, stresses the importance in evaluating events in Indonesia since the reform era and not to exaggerate the strength of radical Islamism nor overlook the role of "simple patronage and extralegal competition".⁵¹

As Wright-Neville argues, *Laskar Jihad's* interim involvement in Maluku reflects the group's restricted agenda, which differentiates it from the international terrorist ideology of indiscriminate killing.⁵² Ulil Abshar Abdalla, the founder of JIL (Jaringan Islam Liberal or the Islamic Liberal Network), argues that there is nothing uniquely anti-Christian about *Laskar Jihad*.⁵³

⁴⁸*Ibid*, 16.

⁴⁹For a fuller account, see Abuza, *Militant...*, 1-33.

⁵⁰Interview, with David Wright-Neville, Melbourne, 20 September 2005.

⁵¹Hefner, *Islam at the Crossroads*, (USINDO: 2002), 17-21.

⁵²Interview with David Wright-Neville, Melbourne, 20 September 2005.

Hamilton-Hart notes that in the terrorism studies, exceptional religious goals are often associated with terrorists and other kinds of violence, first by using the terms 'radical', 'fundamentalist', 'militant', and 'terrorist' interchangeably, and second by pointing to contacts that 'link' individuals with these terms. As a result, 'radical' becomes a threatening category, regardless of whether direct allegations of unlawful and indiscriminate violence are made.

⁵³See Hefner, "Islam ...", 17-21.

Ulil's conviction is that *Laskar Jihad* is just responding to a temporary situation.⁵⁴

Further evidence which distances *Laskar Jihad* from the global network of al-Qaeda is its specific Islamic school of thought. It is true that Ja'far admitted that there were initial contacts that could have led to close cooperation between *Laskar Jihad* and bin Laden, but he rejected the idea because he doubted Osama bin Laden's piety.⁵⁵ Ja'far's refusal to bin Laden, according to Wright-Neville, Fealy, Jones and Hefner, is based on his *Salafi* convictions.⁵⁶ It is not only due to the issue of mass killing of innocents in al-Qaeda's attacks but also in bin Laden's opposition to the Saudi government, a state that enforces Islamic law.⁵⁷ As a Salafi-based organization, LJ's main organisation, FKAJWJ, has a modern organisation structure with 'conservative' views on several issues.

***Laskar Jihad* in Maluku**

After the conflict erupted on 19 January 1999, FKAJWJ despatched a team of researchers to Maluku in late 1999 to gather data on the conflict.⁵⁸ This team found evidence that remnants of the former Republic of the South Mollucas (RMS/Republik Maluku Selatan) based in the Netherlands were actively involved in this movement.⁵⁹ FKAJWJ sent a letter to

⁵⁴Ulil Abshar Abdalla, "The Politics of Islam in a Democratizing Indonesia", (USINDO: 2002), 6.

⁵⁵Interview with David Wright-Neville

⁵⁶Interview with Sidney Jones, Adelaide, 27 September 2005, Interview with David Wright-Neville, Interview with Greg Fealy, Adelaide, 27 September 2005. Hefner, *Muslim...*, 287-290.

⁵⁷Hefner, "Islam ...", 27.

⁵⁸Fealy, *Inside ...*, 1-3, Hefner, *Muslim...*, 287-290.

⁵⁹A key part of their plan, according to *Laskar Jihad*, was to wage war on Muslims in those provinces in order to drive them to other areas. It was, Ja'far said, a plan for "religious cleansing". When pressed on what evidence there was to support this, he referred to the testimony of Christians who

President Habibie urging the government to stop the bloodshed.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the number of casualties on both sides increased as the conflict escalated, especially in Tobelo and Galela in Halmahera island, north Maluku. Since its eruption in 1999, the Maluku conflicts have provided primarily stories of the defeat of Muslims on almost all fronts, as Christians in the city of Ambon (Maluku's capital) outnumbered Muslims.⁶¹

In reacting to the deteriorating situation, Salafi magazine (FKAWJ's magazine) published some *fatwas*⁶² about what Ja'far referred to as 'the Maluku war'. There have been seven *fatwas*, issued by seven different muftis,⁶³ concerning the legal position of being engaged in war in the islands. Issued following the first massive demonstration of *Laskar Jihad*, these *fatwas* emphasised the seriousness of contacts that *Laskar Jihad* had made with their authoritative Saudi Salafi muftis before launching their actions.⁶⁴

Abdul Muhsin al Abbad a Medina Salafi Mufti travelled to the battlefield in Maluku before making decision whether or not jihad to defend Muslims in the islands was lawful, and that Muslims were in a defensive position. Ahmad al-Najm, a

were "loyal to Indonesia" who had leaked documents detailing the Protestant churches' plans. For a contrasting views see George Junus Aditjondro, "Notes on the jihad in Maluku", 2000, 1-10 "The Search for Peace in Maluku", ICG, 2002, Timmer, "Some...", 2-14. See also "Muslim Threaten Jihad in Indonesia", *BBC News*, BBC, 6 April 2000, available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/703749.stm>, consulted 20 October 2005.

⁶⁰For a fuller detail on LJ's letter see *Laskar Jihad Bulletin*, 2000.

⁶¹Hefner observed that "we have to remember however, that at the beginning of the Maluku conflict, the side, if we want to use that phrase, that suffered most, that experienced the most casualties, was the Muslim side" quoted in Hefner, "Islam...", 24.

⁶²Fatwa is legal statement in Islam issued by a mufti or religious body (such as MUI in Indonesia) on a specific issue.

⁶³Hasan, "Faith...", 145-169.

⁶⁴Ibid, 145-169, see also Ja'far U. Thalib, "Menepis Rekayasa Fatwa: Seputar Jihad Di Maluku", *Salafy*, 2000.

member of the Saudi senior *Ulama* committee, agreed with the necessity of waging jihad in Ambon and suggested that Muslims were obligated to help their oppressed brothers.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, both muftis warned that *Laskar Jihad* had to take the incremental steps. First, is to choose a representative whom would approach and advice the ruler (President).⁶⁶ Second, if the ruler considered their suggestions, *Laskar Jihad* should obey him. However, if the ruler rejected their suggestions, it is justified for Muslims to undertake jihad as long as they had sufficient power, and thus would not be harmful to Muslims themselves.⁶⁷ Equally, it is fair to argue here that the Salafi-Wahhabi view of LJ sees suicide bombings like those in the Bali blasts part I and II are illegitimate since they hurt Muslims themselves.

It appears that FKAJ followed the muftis' advices. In January and April 2000, FKAJ's representatives asked Habibie's successor Abdurrahman Wahid to stop the conflicts immediately or to allow Muslims to go to Maluku to defend their brothers.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the President' inertia to stop the conflict made it clear for LJ that sending fighters to Maluku was the last resort.⁶⁹

Subsequently, despite Wahid's instruction to stop *Laskar Jihad*, the latter sent its fighters to the conflict region starting

⁶⁵Hefner, "Islam...", p. 24.

⁶⁶ "Six representatives of the Jihad paramilitary troops meet the president", *Kompas*, Jakarta, 7 April 2000.

⁶⁷These final steps required *Laskar Jihad* to assure that they had enough resources to wage Jihad in Maluku before took any action.

⁶⁸ "Six representatives of the Jihad paramilitary troops meet the president", *Kompas*, Jakarta, 7 April 2000.

⁶⁹President Wahid's statement in December 1999 that the Ambonese should solve their own problems as well as his vice president Megawati assertion that "community members themselves have to feel that it is their own responsibility (to find peace)", <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/596369.stm>

from May 2000.⁷⁰ The paramilitary group claimed it would leave the Maluku if the government's imposition of a civil emergency status succeeding in protecting Muslims, a pre-condition that was not met by the President and his deputy's statements.⁷¹

Jihad as a Collective Obligation

The term jihad literally means 'exerted'. Its juridical-theological meaning is exertion of one's power in Allah's path. Therefore, jihad in the broader sense of exertion does not necessarily mean war or fighting, since exertion in Allah's path can be achieved by peaceful as well as violent means. As violent means, jihad must be a defensive tool that is decided in a collective manner and it is run as a collective obligation.⁷² The following basic and brief illustrations of the latter definition of jihad in Islam are important in order to analyse the *Laskar Jihad*' involvement in the Maluku conflicts 2000-2002.

It is essential to take into account that jihad is not included among the five pillars of Islam. The five pillars or the basic articles of the faith such as prayer and fasting are individual duties. Every Muslim must individually perform them and each is liable for punishment if he fails to perform them. All jurists, on the other hand, regarded jihad as a collective obligation—unless the Muslim community under sudden attack and therefore all Muslim including women and children are under the obligation to fight.⁷³ Jihad ceases to be obligatory on others if it fulfilled by a part of the community; the whole community, however, falls into error if the jihad is not performed at all.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Thalib, *Radio Suara Perjuangan Maluku*, 2002.

⁷¹<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/596369.stm>

⁷²Khadduri Madjid, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, (New Jersey: John Hopkins University Press, 1955), 12-22.

⁷³Ibid, 22.

⁷⁴For a contrasting view on Jihad Interpretation see Adam Silverman, "Just War, Jihad, and Terrorism: A Comparison of Western and Islamic

The imposition of jihad on the community rather than on the individual involved has at least two important implications. In the first place, it means that all Muslims need not necessarily fulfil the duty because the recruitment of all Muslims as warriors is neither possible nor advisable as some Muslims are required to prepare food and weapons, while the crippled, blind and sick would not qualify as fighters.⁷⁵ Women and children are, as a rule, excused from actual fighting, although many women contribute indirectly to the war effort.

Finally, yet most importantly, the imposition of the obligation on the community rather than on the individual makes the employment of jihad possible as a community and, consequently, a state instrument. Its control is accordingly a state not an individual responsibility. Consequently, the head of the state can serve the common interest of the community in a more effective way rather than if the matter is left entirely to the judgment of the individual Muslim.

Conclusion

In summary, the group's finding team to the conflicted areas, as well as its request for *fatwas* before it took action, verifies *Laskar Jihad*'s consistency with the conceptions of jihad as a collective obligation, that is jihad must be decided collectively and treated carefully. In other words, jihad in Maluku was not something that could be solely decided by Ja'far Umar Thalib himself. Close association with an authoritative Saudi senior, the *Ulama* committee, elucidated *Laskar Jihad*'s compliment to the Saudi government which is in contrast with Osama bin Laden.⁷⁶

Norms for the use of Political Violence", *Journal of Church and State*, No 44, (2002), 73-93.

⁷⁵Johnson, J.T. "Jihad and Just War", *A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, (2002), 12-13.

⁷⁶Interview with Wright-Neville, Hefner, "Islam ...", 17-24.

These, confirm that had a relationship with al-Qaeda existed, it was purely pragmatic and would fade once the conflicts ended.⁷⁷

In addition, LJ's respect and hope that the government would resolve the violence was also illustrated in the group's letters, and diplomatic approaches to president Habibie and Wahid.⁷⁸ It is noteworthy to consider that *Laskar Jihad*, unlike JI, has no objection to a secular government for Indonesia, but one that protects Muslims, regardless of their nominal numbers in selected regions of Indonesia. Its support for Indonesia's territorial integrity is also beyond doubt. This is evidenced *Laskar Jihad's* decision to actively oppose the Maluku Separatist Movement (RMS) as one of the main actors in the conflicts in 2000-2002, in which *Laskar Jihad* sent fighters as well as humanitarian groups.⁷⁹

If only the government acted quickly and adequately to find peace in Maluku, *Laskar Jihad* would not have come to the conflict areas or perhaps this group would never have existed. It is important to note that there is nothing uniquely anti-Christian about *Laskar Jihad*. In a safe area—like Yogyakarta in which *Laskar Jihad's* headquarters is located—where Muslim and Christian live together peacefully, *Laskar Jihad* takes no actions. Based on its jihad perception, LJ saw itself in Maluku as a collective defense for 'us' against 'them', to sacrifice themselves through jihad and to allow society to escape from the sin of not defending Muslims.

⁷⁷The Maluku conflict erupted again in 2004; however, the quick and formal response for the government demonstrates that RMS (the South Mollucan Republic) agitated the conflict. Therefore, there is no need to send any fighter out of the security apparatus. Liputan 6, "Panglima TNI: Konflik Ambon Murni soal RMS" (Ambon' Conflict is pure about RMS), SCTV, 29 April 2004.

⁷⁸ "Six representatives of the Jihad paramilitary troops meet the president", *Kompas*, Jakarta, 7 April 2000.

⁷⁹Baker, *Laskar...*, 21-27.

Thus, the thesis addressed to *Laskar Jihad* as having a close relationship to international terrorist networks is just an illusion. The facts that the commander of LJ (Ja'far Umar Thalib) was the veteran of Mujahidin in Afganistan and was assumed to have met Osama bin Laden were not sufficient to come to such conclusion. Even the threat attached to it to American national security which was merely based on the indication of links it had with al-Qaeda proves that America always tries to find any possible ways to legitimize the war against terrorists, and what is meant by terrorists here is Islam.●

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