

# TRANSNATIONAL ISLAM IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

## *Movements, Networks, and Conflict Dynamics*

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## — FOREWORD —

Events in recent years have drawn considerable attention to the growing importance of transnational Muslim networks in the political and conflict dynamics of South and Southeast Asia. While much analysis has focused on militant groups such as Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah, other radical Islamist groups (e.g., Hizb ut-Tahrir), broad-based ideologies (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood movement and Jamaat-i-Islami), and even predominantly quietist networks (e.g., Jama'at al-Tabligh and various Sufi brotherhoods) also exert significant social and political influence.

This report represents the culmination of a year-long initiative launched by NBR to explore the landscape of transnational Islam in South and Southeast Asia and assess its implications for these regions' sociopolitical futures. NBR assembled an international team of experts to assess transnational Islam as it manifests in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The team shared preliminary findings at a workshop co-hosted by NBR and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore in June 2008, inviting audience participation from a cross-section of academic, government, and think-tank communities in Singapore and the region to further inform the project's research and the papers in this report.

Given its considerable policy relevance, exploring emerging trends and developments in Muslim Asia will remain a priority research area for NBR's Political and Security Affairs Group. NBR studies have found that there are many and varied roles of Islam in Asia that go far beyond the actions of the radical fringes that have drawn much attention in recent years. In addition to its work on Islamist terrorism, the organization has also sought to engage less visible yet no less critical issues, related to other global economic, political, and cultural trends influencing Muslim societies in Asia today, to broaden the debate and better inform policy leaders. We look forward to continued interaction with the policy community on this subject as well as to a wide distribution of this report's research findings.

I would like to recognize and express appreciation to the members of the research team whose work appears in these pages. It has been a true pleasure to work with each of them, and the project has benefited immensely from their expertise and professionalism. In particular, I would like to thank Peter Mandaville for his vision and leadership, which guided the project from its inception. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the NBR project team, fellows, and editors, whose efforts contributed to the success of this initiative.

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# Transnational Islam in Asia: Background, Typology and Conceptual Overview

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper provides an overview of the history of transnational Islam in South and Southeast Asia, identifying key vectors of religious transmission and points of continuity between historical and contemporary patterns of cross-regional Islamic discourse. The paper proposes that contemporary manifestations of transnational Islam problematize conventional categorizations of movements and political ideologies through frequent cross-fertilization across political and militant tendencies. The paper further suggests that the emerging geography of globalized Islam calls into question the extent to which political manifestations of Islam can be analyzed with exclusive reference to local circumstances or sources of discontent.

### MAIN FINDINGS

Manifestations of contemporary transnational Islam in South and Southeast Asia occur in four primary forms: Sufi brotherhoods, renewalist/pietistic movements, Islamist parties and groups, charitable organizations and *da'wa* organizations; the primary conduits for the cross-border transmission of Islam today include scholarly exchange and study abroad, labor migration, new media, and ritual obligations (e.g. pilgrimage). Influences from transnational Islam do not involve the subversion or eradication of local religious sensibilities but rather a far more complex dynamic whereby external ideas and beliefs are adapted to and grafted onto existing worldviews and conditions. Transnational Islam is not exclusively about religion but can sometimes represent a vocabulary through which broader global debates about political and socioeconomic disenfranchisement can be engaged. The fluidity of transnational Islam on the ground in specific country contexts is such that the social reality of such movement rarely corresponds exactly to the categories and orientations suggested by conventional analytical typologies (e.g. sharp distinctions between 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' groups).

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The involvement of transnational Islamic groups in a localized conflict is frequently associated with an escalation dynamic that raises the ideological stakes of the dispute through association with 'global' Muslim causes and by introducing new resources (ideational and material) into the conflict equation.
- Transnational Islamic groups leverage the political sentiments that accrue from both government responses to Muslim grievances and to broader geopolitical issues (e.g. global war on terror, war on Iraq) to build local constituencies.
- At least one form of transnational Islamic networking—that between political parties and movements operating in the 'justice and development' mold—holds the potential to serve as an effective and largely democratic space for the aggregation of Muslim discontent and the pursuit of social justice in the name of Islam.
- The complex geographies of transnational Islam, which involve organizations and diasporas located well beyond the confines of South and Southeast Asia, mean that efforts to exert policy influence on Muslim actors in the region may well involve interventions and actors located in the Middle East, Europe, and North America.

While the theme of transnational Islam in Asia most readily brings to mind recent events in countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia, or networks and movements such as Al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah and the Taliban, transnational Islamic influences in South and Southeast Asia have a long and complex history dating back hundreds of years. And, while it is these contemporary groups and conflict situations that will constitute the primary focus of the present study, it is important both to contextualize them in historical terms, and to gain a better understanding of how they relate to the diverse range of transnational Islamic currents to be found in the region today.

How were the conduits through which contemporary Muslim social and political activists operate between Asia and the Middle East—or, indeed, within Asia itself—first established? How have mainstream mass Islamist movements from the Arab world, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, influenced politics and conflict dynamics in South and Southeast Asia, and how do they intersect with radical and militant groups? Where do centuries-old Sufi networks and more recent pietist movements, such as the Tablighi Jama'at, fit into the picture of contemporary transnational Islam in the region?

This paper provides the historical background necessary for understanding the role of transnational Islam in Asia today. Beginning with a brief survey of Islam's transmission to Asia from the Middle East, this section of the paper will focus on the interplay between nation-states and transnational Muslim movements during the twentieth century. Next we will survey and organize the diverse forms (and functions) of transnational Islam in South and Southeast Asia through the development of a typology of actors, groups, and drivers of Muslim transnationalism. Finally, and by way of building a foundation for the thematic and country case studies to follow, we will identify and briefly discuss some of the major issues—both conceptual and empirical—relating to contemporary transnational Islam. This will involve looking at different ways of thinking about the meaning and significance of transnational Islam in the region, the role of transnational Islam within the wider “religious field” and particularly its interaction with other forms of religious transnationalism (e.g. Christian missionary activity), the role of state-sponsored religious transnationalism, and the impact of issues such as social class on the organizational dynamics of transnational Islam. The impact of Muslim transnationalism on local conflicts, domestic and regional politics, and broader issues of social cohesion will also be considered in this final section.

It is important to emphasize that the case studies contained in this study do not constitute a comprehensive or exhaustive inventory of contemporary transnational Islam in Asia. Rather, they represent a mixture of key movements from a policy perspective, and other groups illustrative of distinctive trends and types that collectively define the regional ecosystem of Muslim transnationalism. While an analytical typology is offered below, the complexity and diversity of Islamic networking in Asia cannot—as we will see—be reduced exclusively to such a framework.

## Historically Transnational: Islam, the Middle East, and Asia<sup>1</sup>

Commercial ties between South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East predate the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, whose home city of Mecca in western Arabia was a waypoint

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the accounts of historical Muslim transnationalism in South and Southeast Asia offered below rely on the standard works by Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) and Ira Marvin Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

on the trading networks that brought merchandise and commodities up to the Levant from south Arabian ports. The transmission of Islam from the Middle East to Asia—initially to the Indian subcontinent—begins as early as the second decade of the eighth century, reaching its southeastern extremes in the Malay archipelagos by the thirteenth century. Janet Abu-Lughod's book *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* provides us with an account of something akin to “proto-globalization” in the southeastern quadrant of the globe during this period, with rich commercial, scholarly and political ties springing up to connect East Africa to Southern Arabia, and on across to South and Southeast Asia. Indeed, as a weakened centralized Muslim polity in the Middle East found itself plundered by foreign invaders, the Indian Ocean emerges as a vibrant space of Muslim commercial and intellectual exchange. Although some of the societies encompassed within this mini-world system, such as parts of present-day Malaysia and Indonesia, took several hundred years to embrace the religion, the centrality of Muslim traders and scholars within these networks ensured that Islam served from early on as an important form of transnational symbolic “currency.” The vectors of mercantile activity and human mobility produced by this system have endured in certain important respects, forming the foundation of communal and intellectual ties that link Muslims in South and Southeast Asia to the Middle East, as well as to each other, right up into the contemporary period.

### *Transnationalism and the History of Islam in South Asia*

Sind and the northwestern coast of India fell to Arab Muslims during the Umayyad Empire early in the eighth century, but Islam's presence in the subcontinent is really only consolidated two centuries later with the rise of the Ghaznavids—an Iranian-Afghan dynasty that paid nominal lip service to the authority of the Abbasids in Baghdad, but which ruled, for all intents and purposes, as a regional sovereign. Penetrating into northern India after capturing Lahore in the first half of the eleventh century, the Ghaznavids placed particular emphasis on capturing the Isma'ili (that is, Shi'i) coastal towns that had been established by the Fatimids in Cairo and which still maintained profitable trade with North Africa.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of these Fatimid footholds, relatively large numbers of Isma'ilis migrated to India from Yemen in the thirteenth centuries. When the Ghaznavids turned to Turkic *mamluks* (slave-soldiers) in favor of local elites to serve as their proxies in the late twelfth centuries, a relationship with the Abbasid Caliph helped to buttress their religio-political legitimacy.

Over the next four hundred years, the systematic Muslim conquest of South Asia would proceed at the hands of various dynasties, several of them dominated by *mamluks*. Under the Ghurids, Khalijis, and Tughluqs, Muslim rule extended to Gujarat, Rajasthan, the Deccan region, and much of southern India. Turkic forces continued to be imported from central Asia to rival the influence of local notables, and there was ongoing recognition of the 'Abbasid caliph in Cairo—now also under *mamluk* rule, but with the Caliph by this time acting as little more than a symbolic figurehead.

The central Middle East was not, however, the only external reference point for South Asia's Muslim rulers, with Iranian conceptions of political authority also having some important influence—especially through the literary form of the kinship manual, modeled after the Seljuq advisor Nizam al-Mulk's celebrated eleventh century work the *Siyasatnama* (Book of Government). Literary work also served as an important inter-regional conduit in Bengal, with local notables

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<sup>2</sup> Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

and mystics establishing literary Bengali via the translation of Arabic and Persian works. And, while the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries saw political authorities such as the Sultanate of Gujarat patronizing local languages and generating a distinctly Indian idiom of Islam (through architectural forms, storytelling, local saintly figures, etc.), notables, soldiers and religious scholars from Central Asia and Afghanistan continued to rule Muslim India.

The persistence of many elements of local Hindu culture is an important element in the growth and phenomenal spread of Sufi (popular mystical) Islam in India.<sup>3</sup> In addition to translating texts from other key Muslim languages, Sufi saints—whose social function readily mapped onto pre-existing Hindu categories—adopted local languages and permitted the continued practice of Hindu rituals rather than imposing a dogmatic Islamic orthodoxy. This cross-fertilization worked both ways, with Hindus, for example, even participating in the Shi'i commemoration of 'Ashura, along with other festivals associated with popular Sufi saints.<sup>4</sup> While Sufis played a prominent role in bringing strong numbers of Indians to Islam, the enduring presence of Hindu culture and its concomitant social structures (e.g. the caste system) proved, however, to be something of a hindrance to mass conversion. The subcontinent's Turkic rulers also had not sought to reconfigure the demographics of the region through the wholesale import of large numbers of Muslims.

As we enter the modern period, our focus in South Asia shifts to the Moghul Empire (1526-1858), which brought much of present day Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan under a centralized Muslim authority. Turkic, Afghan, and Iranian influences continued to have a strong role, with Persian serving as the language of court and reference point in terms of art and literature. This "regional cosmopolitanism" came to define Mughal Islam and to distinguish it from the narrower concerns of jurisprudential high orthodoxy. In the second half of the Mughal period, however, increased contact with the Middle East by modernist reformers and activists challenged the legacy of religious syncretism in the subcontinent.

Figures such as Shah Walliallah (1702-1763), Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (1786-1831), and Hajji Shari'atallah (1781-1840)—all of whom either studied in or were heavily influenced by revivalist trends emanating from the Middle East (such as the ideas of Arabian puritanist Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab)—argued for the expunging from Indian Islam of Hindu-influenced rituals, tolerance of Shi'ism, and various practices relating to the veneration of Sufi saints, which they regarded as idolatry. This was replaced by an emphasis on basic tenants of faith and a reliance on the core scriptural sources of the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition (Sunna), a development which formed the basis of what eventually developed into a South Asian variant of puritanical modernism in the Ahl-e-Hadith movement.

But Sufism continued to play an important role, as expressed in the Barelwi movement, with the Qadiriyya and Chistiyya orders being particularly prominent. One of the most seminal events in modern South Asian Islam occurred with the founding of the Dar ul-'Ulum seminary at Deoband in 1867. This current, which merged the principles of Islamic revivalism and neo-orthodoxy with elements of Sufism, soon consolidated itself as the leading center of Islamic scholarly production in South Asia, attracting students not only from all over the region but also from the Arab world.

While the Pan-Islam ideology of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) never had much purchase as an anti-colonial movement in South Asia, Ottoman solidarity and support for the Caliph in Istanbul did enter the political formulations of the subcontinent's Muslims through the All-India

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<sup>3</sup> Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reviving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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# Islamist Networks and Mainstream Politics in South and Southeast Asia

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper assesses the role of transnational Islamist networks in South and Southeast Asia, paying particular attention to their impact on questions of religious and national identity throughout these regions. The paper argues that much of the current concern over Islamist politics in Asia is due to the mistaken assumption that religion has played a secondary role in the development of Asian society, and that much of what has determined the nation-building process in South and Southeast Asia has been the prerogatives of developmentalism and nationalism. Understanding the development and spread of religio-political networks across South and Southeast Asia today has to take into consideration the long historical precedent that laid the ground for the fertile development of religious-based politics currently underway in the region.

### MAIN FINDINGS

While globalization processes have not invented pan-Islamic networks, they have aided their development. The result has been the creation of an increasingly well-connected global Islamic space that baffles the governmentality of nation-builders who are used to mainstream national politics with identifiable mainstream national actors and agents. Islamist networks throughout Asia have profited from this crisis of governmentality in many ways. They have assumed the mantle of the new anti-globalisation forces which was once the elected space of the nationalists. Islamists long to create a global pan-Islamic space where belonging to the same faith community is the only passport one needs to travel across the Muslim world unrestricted and remain comfortable in the safe confines of a Muslim universe. Though the Islamist project is sometimes couched in aggressive, if not militarist, terms of conquest and expansion, the yearning is fundamentally a mundane one. The history of South and Southeast Asia demonstrates that religious-based mobilization has been one of the most effective tools for gathering public support and ensuring public consensus for a range of political projects, the chief of which was the mobilization of Asians against colonial rule.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Understanding the shift wherein the Islamist voices have come closer to the center stage of national politics in many Muslim countries means taking into consideration how and why globalization has actually helped to weaken the credibility and standing of the older generation of statist, developmentalist-oriented national leaders and ruling elite.
- Should the networking process of transnational Islamist groups embed itself to the point where it presents communities with new notions of identity (such as that of the universal Muslim subject), then the very notion of what constitutes a political mainstream itself may be undermined, questioned, or eroded.
- The network capabilities of Islamist groups will have serious implications on the national politics and mainstream public domain in their respective countries. Looking at how the localized conflicts in areas like southern Thailand, Kashmir, and the southern Philippines have now been elevated to the global level, it is vital to identify the workings of the globalization process and how such global networks have created this common pan-Islamic terrain with a unitary geography and real-time correspondence that does not recognize or stop at the frontiers of established nation-states.

## Historical Continuities and New Modalities

That there exist numerous networks of religious-based political and pseudo-political movements and organizations across South and Southeast Asia today should not strike anyone by surprise. Much of the concern that has been raised of late over the appearance of religiously-inspired politics in Asia is due to the mistaken assumption that religion has played a largely passive or secondary role in the development of Asian society since the end of colonial rule and that much of what has guided and determined the nation-building process in South and Southeast Asia has been the prerogatives of good governance, developmentalism and nationalism.

Yet a quick historical survey of the development of South and Southeast Asia would show very clearly that the spread of religion and the development of the respective political cultures of all these societies (which, by the 20th century adapted and developed the frameworks of modern nation-states) went hand-in-hand. Early South Asian notions and values of governance were shaped by the dominant religious belief and value systems of the Indian people, with much of Indian political culture determined by religio-ethnic tenets of the Vedantic faith. Likewise the spread of Indianized culture to Southeast Asia (both mainland and maritime) brought with it not only Indian aesthetics and value-systems but also the vocabulary and ideology of kingship and governance, shaping the political culture of many Southeast Asian countries until today.<sup>33</sup>

By the 13th century the spread of Islam across South and Southeast Asia merely added another layer of religio-political semantics and semiotics on what was already a number of polities where the relationship between religion, politics and governance was an intimate one. By the late 19th century Islam was certainly a potent and visible force in many predominantly Muslim countries across the Arab world and Asia. As noted by Kramer, it was Islam that served as the basis for what later became the nascent anti-colonial movement across the Muslim world as well as the subject for long-extended and widely-disseminated debates on modernization and reform all over the Muslim world.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, the mobilization of Muslims worldwide on the basis of a global sense of Muslim identity and shared values was neither new nor unique, for similar developments were taking place among the Christians, Hindus and Buddhists of Asia. The work of Lubeck and Britts has shown that religious-based mobilization was not confined to Asia either, for similar developments were also taking place in other parts of the world, such as east Africa. Pious activists shared the same political objectives: the mobilization of the masses, the gathering of in-group members of the same faith community, the development of political movements and the creation of a political economy of faith-based politics. These objectives were often combined with transnational ambitions.<sup>35</sup>

Understanding the development and spread of religio-political networks across South and Southeast Asia today, therefore, has to take into consideration the long historical precedent that

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<sup>33</sup> As testified by the fact that the very word for “government” in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Thailand is derivative of the Indian-Hindu notion of divine kingship, *kerajaan*.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congress* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1986).

<sup>35</sup> Paul Lubeck, *Islam and Urban Labour in Northern Nigeria: The Making of a Muslim Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Paul M. Lubeck and Bryana Britts, “Muslim Civil Society and Urban Public Spaces: Globalization, Discursive Shifts and Social Movements,” in *Urban Studies: Contemporary and Future Perspectives*, eds. J. Eade and C. Mele (London: Blackwell, 2001).

laid the ground for the fertile development of religious-based politics as we are witnessing in the region at the present. The rise of Christian politics in the Philippines, Hindu politics in India, Buddhist politics in Thailand and Sri Lanka, Islamism in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia can only be understood against such a broad historical background which paved the way for the inculcation of religious values and ideas into the socio-cultural milieu of the region, where religion has never been seen as a stranger to politics and the conduct of governance in the public domain.<sup>36</sup>

The first premise that has to be set therefore is this: That despite the adoption of modern notions and values associated with the modern nation-state, most postcolonial Asian states have

The history of Southeast Asia would demonstrate that religious-based mobilization was the most effective tool for the gathering of public support and ensuring public consensus for a range of political projects...

really been engaged in a process of grafting and bricolage where modern concepts and values such as constitutionalism, the rule of law, citizenship, etc., have merely been grafted upon a socio-political environment that was never secular (understood in the French meaning of the word *Laicite*) in the first place. The rise of religious politics in Asia is therefore neither an anomaly nor a novel phenomenon that needs explanation for Asians themselves.

## Religious Mobilization and Networks: Return to a Pre-Modern Globalized Space

The history of 21<sup>st</sup> century Asian politics demonstrates the effectiveness of religious-based political mobilization to an entire generation of Asian political actors and agents. The history of Southeast Asia would demonstrate that religious-based mobilization was the most effective tool for the gathering of public support and ensuring public consensus for a range of political projects, the chief of which was the mobilization of Asians against colonial rule.

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<sup>36</sup> There exist numerous works written by scholars who have focused on the development of political Islam or Islamism to date. Undoubtedly the best study of the historical development of the Jama'at-e Islami party of Pakistan (with its links and chapters to the Jama'at-e Islami of India and Bangladesh) is Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994). On the development of the *Taliban* that began along the borders of Pakistan-Afghanistan, see Ahmad Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001). On the development of the Deobandi school of thought in India and its development into a movement with political ambitions, see Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); and Barbara D. Metcalf, *Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis and Talibs*, ISIM Papers IV (Leiden: International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM), 2002).

For the development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), see Farish A. Noor, *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS, 1951-2003* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), 2004). The best study on the development of the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) remains the one by Muhammad Nor Monutty, *Perceptions of Social Change in Contemporary Malaysia: A Critical Analysis of ABIM's Role and Impact on Muslim Youth* (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1988, unpublished). See also *Revival of Islam in Malaysia: The Role of ABIM* (Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), 1974). For further studies on the development of political Islam in Malaysia during the 1970s to the 1980s, see Chandra Muzaffar "Islamic Resurgence: A Global View," in *Islam and Society in Southeast Asia*, eds. Taufik Abdullah and Sharon Siddique (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), 1986); Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti Press, 1987); and Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984). A detailed comparison of the impact of the Iranian revolution on the development of Islamist movements of Southeast Asia can be found at: Fred R. von der Mehden, "Malaysian and Indonesian Islamic Movements and the Iranian Connection" in *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact*, ed. John Esposito, (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990).

In the cases of Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, the emergence of early proto-nationalist thought came hand-in-hand with the development of new religio-political identities and movements. The rise of modern Buddhist activism in Burma was one of the catalysts that mobilized the Burmese intellectual classes against British rule since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; and similar developments are to be found in the case of rising Malay-Muslim consciousness in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. The fact that many of the early pioneers of the anti-colonial movement were Muslim reformers who were captivated and inspired by the reformist zeal of fellow Muslim modernizers in India, Egypt and the Arab lands suggests that religion has indeed been a mobilizing factor in the development of political awareness. This is further bolstered by the fact that among the first anti-colonial movements in the region, many of them were clearly identified by their sectarian, Muslim membership and Islamist leanings such as the *Sarekat Islam* of Indonesia.

The work of Benda is instructive in this respect. He has noted how the rise of nationalism and Islamism in Indonesia during the mid-colonial era leading to the Second World War went hand-in-hand. Benda has also observed how the Islamists of Indonesia played a crucial role in first mobilizing the Indonesian Muslim commercial groups on the basis of class solidarity and later went on to create the first anti-colonial movements on the basis of a shared ethnic-religious solidarity.<sup>37</sup> From the outset these Islamist groups combined both the goals of anti-colonialism with the broader vision of a global—and politically mobilized and active—Muslim *Ummah*, prompting organizations like the *Sarekat Islam* to spread its wings across the South China Sea and open up branches in neighboring states like British Malaya.<sup>38</sup>

Developments in Southeast Asia were matched by similar developments in South Asia, with groups like the Muslim League of India opening up chapters and branches all across the Indian subcontinent and eliciting support from the Indian-Muslim diaspora in other places such as Penang, Malacca and Singapore (which were then under British rule and grouped together as the British Straits Settlements).<sup>39</sup> Nasr notes that in the case of the Jama'at-e Islami—arguably the most important and well-known of the Islamist political movements of South Asia—the same historical trajectory can be seen: What began as a movement for Muslim solidarity later joined forces with Indian nationalists (including the Congress Party of India and the Muslim League), to later emerge on its own as the subcontinent's first and foremost Islamist political movement with a clearly defined Islamist agenda.<sup>40</sup>

Even after the partition between India and Pakistan, and the migration of many of the Jama'at's leaders to Pakistan, the Jama'at-e Islami continued in its efforts to defend and promote Muslim political, economic, educational and cultural interests in both India and Pakistan, albeit according to the modalities that were available as defined by the very different political circumstances they faced in the two countries. This continued well after the conflict between East and West Pakistan in 1971 and the creation of the state of Bangladesh, where the Jama'at still operates. Furthermore,

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<sup>37</sup> Harry J. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun: Indonesian Islam under Japanese Occupation 1942–1945* (Leiden: Fouris, 1983, orig. publ. 1958).

<sup>38</sup> See: Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, "Sarekat Islam di Trengganu," *Malaysia in History* XX, no. 11 (1972).

<sup>39</sup> The Muslim League of India actually influenced and inspired the creation of the Muslim League of Malaya, which later developed into a political force by the 1960s and eventually culminated in the creation of the *Kesatuan India Muslim Malaysia* (KIMMA, also known as *Kongres India Muslim Malaysia*) which was formed in 1979 in Penang.

<sup>40</sup> Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*.

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# Transnational Ideologies and Actors at the Level of Society in South and Southeast Asia

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines key transnational Islamic movements and missionary networks active in South and Southeast Asia—the Indian Tablighi Jama’at (TJ), the Palestinian Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), and Saudi Arabian Salafi movements. The paper looks at the structure and ideology of these movements, in general, giving particular attention to their embeddedness in everyday life. The paper observes these movements’ recruitment and training strategies as well as the patterns of socialization taking place within these movements. A global market has emerged in response to the phenomenal growth of these transnational movements wherein Islamic actors compete for followers and authority while local Muslim communities negotiate their ties with transnational Islamic networks.

### MAIN FINDINGS

By joining transnational Islamic networks, Muslims from the most marginal societies in South and Southeast Asia are brought to the forefront of the globalized Islamic community. Participation in these movements gives downtrodden masses the status of faithful members of the umma, lending them prestige and psychological uplift. Transnational Islamic actors and movements contribute to the growing Islamization of society, the increased presence of Islam in public spaces, the individualization of Islam and Islamic piety, and the consumption of Islamic products in daily life. The TJ, HT, and Salafi movements strive to be the vanguard of the Islamic revolution throughout South and Southeast Asia. These movements attempt to build a truly Islamic society on the model of the Prophet Muhammad and his faithful followers. While the Tablighi Jama’at is a quietist, apolitical movement operating at the grassroots level, the political Hizb ut-Tahrir recruits its cadres from urban middle-class students. Both movements benefit from the growing presence and demands of a new generation of young Muslims, ages 18-25, who look for a total, encapsulating form of Islam as a modern solution to their problems and as a path to spiritual experience and strengthened piety. The growing presence of political Islamist and Salafi movements contributes to the rapid erosion of traditional Muslim elites’ authority as well as the increasing competition between traditional Sufi groups and modernizing reformist movements.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Policymakers should avoid confusing transnational pietist movements with militant groups. While Islamic movements like the TJ and HT are political in their indoctrination methods, they are nonviolent. However, their rhetoric of hatred and anti-Americanism remains a topic of serious concern.
- Pietist movements should be given suitable channels for expression. Many Muslims suffer discrimination and political exclusion. Providing these communities with channels for expression will help Muslims openly fulfill their political and spiritual aspirations. Repressive measures will only create hatred and resentment.
- Involve transnational Islamic actors in the democratic process. When Islamic groups and movements enter the democratic process, they tend to develop more moderate and pragmatic approaches.
- In focusing on the global, policymakers should not lose sight of the local. Transnational Islamic ideas and movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, TJ and HT are being localized and indigenized at the same time. Policymakers should be alert to local differences and realities in crafting effective and nuanced solutions.

The dearth of research focusing on transnational Islamic da'wa (missionary)<sup>50</sup> movements and networks that emerged in the 1980s at the level of society should be underlined. Social scientists have rarely provided a clear description of the workings of transnational Islamic movements in local society. However, a new generation of scholars has examined the circulation of ideas and ideologies across these transnational networks as well as the emergence of new global social configurations in the dynamic Muslim environment of the South (i.e., the countries of South and Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East).<sup>51</sup>

In particular, educational and missionary efforts, as well as political activities in the Islamic world, give strength to an alternate form of Islamic globalization along the South-South axis (i.e., between the countries of the Middle East and South and Southeast Asia).<sup>52</sup> To grasp this dynamic, we have to look simultaneously at the social organization and ideology of transnational Islamic movements at a global level and their interfaces with local society at a micro-level.<sup>53</sup>

From the global and local levels, we see that the Islamic field in South and Southeast Asia is a highly dynamic, globalized, and polarized one, in which competing transnational Islamic movements and networks rely on diaspora communities and on highly fluid, but effective channels of education and missionary work for their continuing expansion and dissemination of ideas.

To better understand this dynamic Islamic field, this paper examines key transnational movements and missionary networks that are active in South and Southeast Asia—the Indian Tablighi Jama'at (TJ), the Palestinian Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), and Saudi Arabian Salafi<sup>54</sup> movements. The paper looks at the structure and ideology of these movements and networks, in general, and their embeddedness in everyday life, in particular.

This paper presents case studies of the Tablighi Jama'at and the Hizb ut-Tahrir to show the transformation of local religious organizations into global movements, as well as the impact of these movements on local society and Muslims across South and Southeast Asia. While the Tablighi Jama'at is a quietist, apolitical movement that operates at the grassroots level, the political Hizb ut-Tahrir recruits its cadres from the spectrum of urban middle-class students. Both movements benefit from the growing presence and demands of a new generation of young Muslims, ages 18-25, who look for a total, encapsulating form of Islam as a modern solution to their problems providing a community of mutual support, and as a path to spiritual experience and strengthened piety.

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<sup>50</sup> *Da'wa* literally means “to call,” and connotes an invitation to prayer. Islamic revivalist movements have interpreted *da'wa* as the obligation to proselytize (Masud 2000: xxi).

<sup>51</sup> See Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Helmut Buchholt and Georg Stauth, *Investigating the South-South Dimension of Modernity and Islam: Circulating Visions and Ideas, Intellectual Figures, Locations* (Münster: LIT, 1999); and Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); *Global Political Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). On transnational connections through media and networks, see Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections. Culture, People, Places* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> This alternate Islamic globalization occurring along the South-South axis bears ties to the North (i.e., Europe, the United States, and Japan) through migrants who embody the South inside the North. For further discussion of this issue, see Johan Meulemann, *Islam in the Era of Globalization. Muslim Attitudes towards Modernity and Identity* (Jakarta: INIS, 2001).

With regards to the Deobandi transnational educational movement, Reetz states: “The Deobandi networking proves how adaptable the channels of the South are to the new ways of globalization and to what extent they also drive it ahead, that globalization has strengthened alternate approaches side by side with the dominating ways of the West” (Reetz 2007: 158-159).

<sup>53</sup> See John R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Alexander Horstmann, “The Tablighi Jama'at, Transnational Islam, and the Transformation of the Self between Southern Thailand and South Asia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007): 26-40.

<sup>54</sup> Salafi refers to the religion of the “ancestors,” and is a literalist and puritanical version of Islam promoted by Saudi Arabia.

The Tablighi Jama'at and the Hizb ut-Tahrir are lay movements that are mainly led by professionals and not by the *ulama*.<sup>55</sup> The ideology of these movements is anti-secular, anti-Zionist, and pointedly anti-American. The Hizb ut-Tahrir is highly influenced by the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)—especially Sayyid Qutb—and has adopted the MB's organizational patterns.<sup>56</sup> Both the Tablighi Jama'at and the Hizb ut-Tahrir demand strict obedience to the

What emerges is a huge market, in which transnational movements compete for followers and religious authority, and in which local Muslims gain access to global Islamic networks and, sometimes, religious careers.

*shari'a* (Islamic law) which they regard as divine law. While the Tablighi Jama'at strives for the inner purification of the individual Muslim, the Hizb ut-Tahrir uses a nostalgic, a-historical picture of the global caliphate to mobilize new followings.

This paper pays particular attention to these transnational movements' recruitment and training strategies as well as the patterns of socialization taking place within these movements.<sup>57</sup> As the example of the Hizb ut-Tahrir in Indonesia shows, transnational movements are localized in the context of the nation-state and have to be flexible and strategic.

The huge expansion of these and related movements that have shifted from the fringes of society to the global center stage also requires the development of a "faith bureaucracy."<sup>58</sup> What emerges is a huge market, in which transnational movements compete for followers and religious authority, and in which local Muslims gain access to global Islamic networks and, sometimes, religious careers. As the paper also shows, transnational actors increasingly benefit from and contribute to

<sup>55</sup> See Alexander Horstmann, "The Revitalization of Islam in Southeast Asia: The Cases of Darul Arqam and Jama'at Tabligh," *Studia Islamika* 13, no. 1 (2006): 67-9.

<sup>56</sup> Since its founding in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*), the first transnational Islamist movement, has provided both the intellectual foundations and the core methodology for many transnational movements and Islamic groups across the Muslim world. The MB strives for a total Islamic system encompassing all aspects of life, and one from which the state cannot be possibly separated. For a discussion of the MB, see Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, 68.

Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the MB's chief ideologue during the height of its militancy in the 1960s, whose works have been widely translated and received, has become one of the most influential Islamist thinkers across the Muslim world and has greatly influenced the HT. Qutb called for a "Qur'anic generation," modelled on the example of the Prophet's companions, who would engage the individual believer with the truth of the *shari'a* while bypassing the traditional *ulama*. The wide translation and publication of a number of the Muslim Brotherhood's writings has led to a preponderance of its ideas within the general Islamic revival movements in Southeast Asia.

The MB's small cells, where teachers, who are not drawn from the *ulama*, train students in small groups is, of course, one of the key organizational patterns by which local Muslims from South and Southeast Asia are increasingly integrated into the circuits of alternative globalization. The new training program introduced to the Indonesian HT in the early 1970s relied upon the key ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. See James J. Fox, "Currents in Contemporary Islam in Indonesia." Paper presented at Harvard Asia Vision 21, April 29-May 1, 2004, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>57</sup> Apart from the functioning and conceptualization of the transnational movements, we have to also analyze the socialization and transformation of the individuals engaged in these networks.

<sup>58</sup> See Dietrich Reetz, "The 'Faith Bureaucracy' of the Tablighi Jama'at: An Insight into their System of Self-Organisation (Intizam)," in *Colonialism, Modernity, and Religious Identities: Religious Reform Movements in South Asia*, ed. Gwilym Beckerlegge (Oxford, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 98-124. In this article, Reetz argues that the extensive mobilization of new members into their folds requires Islamic movements to establish some form of religious bureaucracy.

the production and consumption of traditional and electronic Islamic media to disseminate their ideas in what is referred to as “pamphlet Islam.”<sup>59</sup>

Following this introduction, the paper is divided into six main sections. First, the paper provides an overview of the Tablighi Jama’at, paying close attention to the life and daily rituals of Tablighi members, the movement’s leadership structure and hierarchy, and its uses of traditional and modern media outlets. Next, the paper looks at the Hizb ut-Tahrir, focusing on the HT chapter in Indonesia (HTI) to illustrate the adaptation of the movement in the local context. The paper then compares the TJ and HT to examples of modern Sufi brotherhoods, illustrating the revitalized relevance of Sufi brotherhoods and global Sufi cults for these movements.<sup>60</sup> Following this discussion, the paper outlines the growing influence of Salafi movements in South and Southeast Asia. After its concluding remarks, the paper presents key policy implications emerging from its central findings.

## The Tablighi Jama’at between South and Southeast Asia, Europe and the World

The Tablighi Jama’at (TJ) (or, sometimes, Jama’at Tabligh), a proselytizing movement founded in India in 1927, has its headquarters in Nizamuddin, a suburb of New Delhi. From its humble beginnings in Mewat, India, the Tablighi Jama’at has become what is probably the largest Islamic missionary movement in the world.<sup>61</sup> Through its northern India-based leadership, the permanent circulation of the Jama’at throughout the world, and the TJ’s *ijtimas* (mass congregations) in Raiwind, Tongi, and New Delhi, the TJ effectively establishes relations with Muslims all over the world.

### Overview

The rise of the TJ to 130 countries has brought this religious movement, which lived on the fringe of society, to the mainstream. In particular, the presence of the TJ in South Asia is overwhelming. The movement has created opportunities for business, education and staged mass marriages held at its numerous *ijtimas*. The TJ has also come to attract a more heterogeneous following. While earlier ethnographies emphasized the South Asian and lower class character of the TJ, the movement today targets white-collar concerns and aspirations, and includes members from across the world, including professionals, civil servants and businessmen. The TJ seems to thrive in Muslim minority contexts in which they are able to show off their religious piety and devotion as well as in Muslim majority contexts where they enjoy the support of Muslim elites.

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<sup>59</sup> “Pamphlet Islam” comes as an inevitable consequence of the growing interest in all matters relating to Islam and Islamic lifestyle. The section on Islam makes up a large share of the increasing number of bookstores in Indonesia and across the world. Pamphlets or books that are translated from Arabic are accorded a certain authority, even when the particular context is virtually unknown. Within this heterogeneous collection of publications, there has appeared a substantial body of literature devoted to the plight of Islam. Many of the publications are anti-Western, anti-capitalist, and pointedly anti-American.

The flood of translations from Arabic without a clear author or authority deserves careful attention and is particularly at odds with the *pesantren* (traditionalist Islamic boarding school) tradition of education in Southeast Asia, which has traditionally concentrated on the interpretation of classic texts guided by authoritative *ulama*. See Martin van Bruinessen, “Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 146 (1990): 226-269.

<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that these actors are not isolated, but act in conjunction and competition with each other. Some of the Southeast Asian Muslim minority communities, such as those found in southern Thailand, Cambodia, or Mindanao, have become laboratories for the missionary activities of a variety of Islamic organizations, including Salafi, Shia, TJ, and the HT. However, only the Tablighi Jama’at reaches into the remote villages of South and Southeast Asia.

<sup>61</sup> See Barbara Metcalf, “Travelers’ Tales in the Tablighi Jama’at,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Vol. 588, no. 1 (2003): 136-148.

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# Migrants, Mujahidin, Madrassa Students: The Diversity of Transnational Islam in Pakistan

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores the diversity of transnational Islam in Pakistan. The paper argues that most of Pakistan's transnational Islamic actors are tied to economic, cultural and religious forms of globalization. The radical and militant forms of transnational Islam in the country are largely driven by factors directly linked to Pakistan's political and security apparatuses. It is suggested that the increase in militant activities in Pakistan stems from the reluctance or inability of Pakistan's government to introduce firm standards of law and civility. The paper contends that networks centered on Islamic scholarship or Pakistan's identity, are not *per se* violent or threatening, but reflect the religious, cultural and ethnic concerns of an expanding global diaspora of South Asian Muslims.

### MAIN FINDINGS

Pakistan has become a major hub of transnational Islam in the region with intense in- and outbound activity rooted in its culture, history and politics. Pakistan's transnational Islamic actors largely emanate from competition between distinct religio-cultural milieus, the most important of which are the Deobandis, the Barelwis, Jama'at-i Islami, the Ahl-i Hadith, the Ahmadiyya and the Muhajirs. Transnational Islam in Pakistan can be distinguished by the different types of religio-political issues it pursues: 1) security and ideology, 2) religious mobilization, and 3) Pakistani nationalist identity. Mainly group one constitutes an abiding threat. The unstable, charged and polarized nature of the overall political framework in Pakistan pushes many transnational actors into the political, extremist and even militant realm. Currently, the major threat to the stability of Pakistan comes from sectarian and jihadi groups that spin out of control from state and religious patronage. The doctrines and politics of sectarianism as expressed in the antagonism between various Pakistani Islamic groups in the struggle for the "true" Islam have heavily contributed to the radicalization of transnational Islamic actors in the country. Religio-cultural networks focused on madrassas (Deobandis, Barelwis), missionary work (Tablighis, Da'wat-i Islami) or political mobilization (Jama'at-i Islami) have their own rationale of expansion and do not necessarily pose threats.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Pakistan cannot successfully fight the Pakistani Taliban as long as some elements in the administration hope to keep intact this militant network for operation against India and the Karzai government. Neither can Pakistan achieve success as long as it does not address the tribal dimension of this warfare successfully since much of current Taliban operations reflect long-standing disaffected and marginalized tribal concerns.
- The Pakistani state needs to resurrect its civil authority and regulate civil institutions without discriminating against them. It will further have to focus on the social rehabilitation and development of disaffected communities giving rise to militant Islam, with education, employment and social amenities holding prime importance.
- Pakistan and international agencies should be discouraged from punishing transnational actors of Islam for their efforts of religious mobilization as such behavior appears to be counterproductive.
- While some political analysts believe that the madrasa system is one major source of instability, religious education will always have to remain religious in nature. Educational standards can only be improved by lifting Pakistani public education in a major way.

Recent news about the abiding tension and violence in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir on the borders with Pakistan has again drawn international attention to transnational actors of Islam operating from Pakistan's territory. But can these transnational actors be uniformly considered a threat and is their virulence and violence related to their religious affiliation? Is all transnational Islam dangerous and why is so much of its activity associated with Pakistan?

Today it is an established fact that Pakistan has become a major international locus and hub of transnational Islamic networks and institutions. These networks and institutions have exercised various degrees of influence on the political and security situation in and around Pakistan. Their impact has grown continuously, particularly since the 1980s. Although most of these forces and networks are now well known through international media coverage and the academic literature, for many observers of international politics—and also of international Islam—the prominence of transnational Islam in Pakistan may still seem paradoxical considering its remote location and the often culturalist connotation of its body politics. To understand why Pakistan, coming from a rather particularist background in terms of its geography, politics and culture, plays such a prominent role in a universalist issue such as today's transnational Islam, this paper intends to discuss:

Today it is an established fact that Pakistan has become a major international locus and hub of transnational Islamic networks and institutions.

- the historical background of this development, with a special emphasis on structural factors installing transnational activism in Pakistan's modern social and political system;
- the structure of this activism with regard to the nature and direction of the religio-political issues involved; and
- the main types of transnational actors and institutions in Pakistan and their relations to the issues driving them.

This explanation will be prefaced by a brief discussion of the nexus between transnationalism and Islam and an introduction of transnational actors of Islam in Pakistan.

### *Transnationalism and Islam*

In general, and even more so in relation to Pakistan, the nature of the transnational activism of Islamic actors and institutions needs to be seen in a rather nuanced light. This analysis here is based on the assumption that religious practice and knowledge alone are hardly responsible for transnational activism in the sense of crossing national borders in and out of Pakistan.

If looked at closely, such transnational activity constitutes only a part of their activism;<sup>96</sup> and is more often than not driven by sociological, political, ideological, ethnic and cultural concerns that are equally shared with non-Islamic actors and institutions.<sup>97</sup>

### *Transnational Actors and Institutions of Islam*

The major players in this field are networks of religious scholars and schools with their religious and political groups and parties creating separate traditions or milieus within Pakistani (and South Asian) Islam that go back to centers and activists in north India before independence. These milieus have acquired partly hereditary endogamous features of sects or clans with a large and continuously growing number of subsidiary outlets (see Appendix I). Their missionary efforts are directed as much at non-Muslims as at each other in the struggle for a larger share and control of the “Islamic field.”

*Deobandi.* The Deobandi scholars and schools refer to the purist and reformist interpretation of Sunni Islam of the Hanafi law school formulated at the Darul Ulum of Deoband in north India, which was founded in 1867. It has now spread through an estimated 2000 schools in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh each. The Deobandi cultural style has been frugal and text-based, fighting against “impermissible innovations” (*bida'*) and for the “true Islam.” This leads the Deobandis to polemical attacks at most other traditions of Islam, but also against non-Muslims. Their political approach is split between oppositional polemics and a pietist yearning for learning. The Deobandi political party, the Jami'iyat-e Ulama-e Islam (JUI, Party of Scholars of Islam, founded in 1944), is the largest component of the Muttahida Majlis-e Amal (MMA), an alliance of Pakistani religious parties founded in 2001. The JUI attracted international attention for its close relations with the Afghan Taliban, sharing with them a reliance on Deobandi doctrine.<sup>98</sup>

*Barelwi.* These groups relate to the devotional tradition of Sufi-related Sunni scholars and schools that centered on the activities of Ahmad Raza Khan Barelwi (1856-1921) in the town of Bareilly in north India. The Barelwis have probably expanded within similar parameters as the Deobandis. The Barelwis' main *raison d'être* was the defense of spiritual rituals against the reformist critique of the Deobandis and others. Doctrine-wise, their differences are small as both follow orthodox adherence (*taqlid*) to the Hanafi law school. But the Barelwis emphasize Sufi traditions such as special praise for the Prophet, and the worship of saints and their shrines, all of which they justify with reference to the Quran and the Prophetic traditions, the Hadith. Their cultural style has been exuberant, and their politics were often marked by loyalty to the powers that be during the colonial period and, afterwards, the independent secular state. In the political

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<sup>96</sup> Nearly all madrasa and mosque networks fit this understanding as local worship and the local transmission of religious knowledge and practice dominate their activities.

<sup>97</sup> A good example for this understanding is the missionary movement of the Tablighi Jama'at (TJ): its main objective, the reconversion of Muslims, does not *per se* require the expansion of activities to other countries, but can be equally achieved by local efforts. It is rather the sociological group dynamics of leadership, control and competition in the Islamic field that drive the TJ around the globe. The same approach is shared by other non-Islamic religious groups from South Asia of Hindu, Sikh, Parsi and Buddhist denomination. This would also belie the assumption that it is monotheistic aspirations of universalist salvation that are reflected in such patterns of behavior. The religious traditions just mentioned are polytheistic and often local in the nature of their worship and practice. Also, non-religious actors have adopted the same pattern, as can be seen from the tendency of Pakistan's political parties to establish foreign branches. During the current author's recent field research in Barcelona, Spain, it was learnt that the Pakistani community there also comprises a unit of the Nawaz Sharif Muslim League. The creation of Pakistan community associations there including even a radio station would make the same point.

<sup>98</sup> See, Dietrich Reetz, “The Deoband Universe: What makes a transcultural and transnational educational movement of Islam?” in “South-South linkages in Islam,” eds. Dietrich Reetz and Bettina Dennerlein, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007), 139-159; and Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

arena the Barelwis are represented by the Jami'at-e Ulama-e Pakistan (JUP, Party of Religious Scholars of Pakistan, founded in 1948).<sup>99</sup>

*Jama'at-i Islami.* The rather modernist Jama'at-i Islami (JI, Islamic Party) network centers on the JI political party created in British India in 1941 and the legacy of its founder Abu'l A'la Maududi (1903-79). The JI is an important political player in Pakistan and Bangladesh, while remaining a cultural and religious organization in India. Their cultural style is modern and technical, while their political approach is issue-based and power-oriented. The JI's objective is to establish political and cultural hegemony, to form the government and rule the country in much the same way as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) did in India, which has greatly inspired them.

*Ahl-i Hadith.* The Ahl-i Hadith (AH, People of the Tradition) scholars and schools represent a minority purist Sunni sect rejecting all Islamic law schools but privileging the Prophetic traditions (Hadith). The AH formed in the north Indian provinces of Punjab and United Provinces at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The AH is known for its strong orientation towards Saudi Arabia and affiliation with Salafi networks. The AH party (Markazi Ahl-i Hadith) consists of several factions. The AH network is polarized between a scholarly and a more radical, militant wing.<sup>100</sup>

*Shia.* The Shia scholars and groups of Pakistan form an important contestant of the Islamic field representing around 15% of all Muslims. Their influence on Pakistan's politics and culture can be traced back to their longstanding share in Muslim culture and politics in the subcontinent, partly through the Shia-dominated principalities and landholders in the late colonial period. The formation of the Tahrik-e Jafariyya-e Pakistan (TJP, Movement for the Introduction of the Shia Legal Code in the Tradition of Imam Jafar) in 1979 marked a turning point in Shia mobilization in Pakistan as Shia activists felt strongly encouraged by the Iranian revolution. Many Shia organizations are still closely connected with Iranian institutions, but also with Shia groups in neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India, as with migrant communities abroad. Their political agenda is shaped by their desire to secure safe minority rights, to uphold traditional influence and to resist doctrinal pressures from the Sunni majority with defiance.<sup>101</sup>

*Ahmadiyya.* The minority sect of the Ahmadiyya founded by Ghulam Ahmad Mirza (1839-1908) also emerged in Punjab province in the late colonial period. Most mainstream Muslim groups regard the Ahmadiyya as heretic. It is particularly the claims of the Ahmadiyya's founder, and his successors to some degree, of Prophethood that have enraged radical Sunni Muslim activists. A constitutional amendment declared the Ahmadis non-Muslims in 1974. The Ahmadis sometimes face violent repression in Pakistan, but have proven enormously resilient, particularly relying on their strong global missionary activities. For Ahmadis, calling themselves Muslim was made a criminal offence under Zia's Islamist dictatorship through amendments of the Penal Code in 1982-86.<sup>102</sup> In spite of strong political and religious pressures, they still

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<sup>99</sup> Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and his Movement, 1870-1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>100</sup> Martin Riexinger, *Sanaullah Amritsari (1868-1948) und die Ahl-i-Hadis im Punjab unter britischer Herrschaft* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004).

<sup>101</sup> Alessandro Monsutti, Silvia Naef, and Farian Sabahi. *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, Worlds of Islam, v. 2 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

<sup>102</sup> Pakistan Penal Code (Amendment) Ordinance, I of 1982; Anti-Islamic Activities of Qadiani Group, Lahori Group and Ahmadis (Prohibition and Punishment) Ordinance, XX of 1984; Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 111 of 1986; amending paragraphs 295 and 298 on offences relating to religion. Cf. Pakistan Penal Code, at [http://www.punjabpolice.gov.pk/user\\_files/File/pakistan\\_penal\\_code\\_xlv\\_of\\_1860.pdf](http://www.punjabpolice.gov.pk/user_files/File/pakistan_penal_code_xlv_of_1860.pdf), accessed August 15, 2008.

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# Interactions of “Transnational” and “Local” Islam in Bangladesh

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines the historical trajectory and current status of key transnational Islamic organizations, conduits and trends in Bangladesh to assess their impact on the socio-political and conflict dynamics of the country. The paper argues that Bangladesh's socio-political dynamics and a weak Bangladeshi state have fostered the proliferation of Islamic organizations and Islamist parties with transnational ties. Transnational Islamist currents have also given rise to militant organizations in Bangladesh over the past decade. The paper argues that Bangladesh will continue to witness tensions between transnational interpretations of Islam and local practices in the future, and argues for a more historically grounded and nuanced strategy to help the country oppose its militant elements while strengthening its pietist, tolerant and secularist currents.

### MAIN FINDINGS

Transnational Islamic and Islamist organizations, both pietist and political, have a considerable presence in Bangladesh. In recent years, the transnational Islamist organizations have grown significantly. Bangladesh's domestic political environment over the past two decades allowed the Islamists to consolidate their position; consequently, it opened the space for transnational Islamist groups to operate with state support. If the situation remains unchanged, the space for Islamist activities will widen further. Some of these Islamist groups espouse violence, posing a threat to the country's security. The presence of transnational militant groups in Bangladesh has also increased sectarianism within the country. Some of these organizations are extending their operations to neighboring India. Local traditional Islamic practices in Bangladesh are undergoing changes due to interactions with the outside world mediated by transnational Islamic groups, the Bangladeshi diaspora community and the global media. The increased religiosity among the Bangladeshi population, palpable changes in dress, social behavior, and increased sensitivity towards religious issues are indicative of the ongoing changes. Bangladesh is likely to continue to witness tensions between local traditional Islamic practices and those promoted by transnational groups, which will have social and political implications alike.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- While it is necessary to remain cognizant of the Islamists' presence in Bangladesh's political arena, the policies of Western nations should not undermine the secularist forces representing the majority of the Bangladeshi population.
- Transnational Islamist thought and organizations are impacting upon both the social and political arenas of Bangladesh; therefore, policies should be cognizant of these twin aspects in order to be comprehensive in nature.
- The local traditional Islamic traits which encourage pietist practices and the separation of faith and politics in Bangladesh should be highlighted and strengthened.
- Emphasis should be given to the enhancement of the Bangladeshi state's capacity for cultivating political goodwill to deal with transnational Islamist political networks which pose a threat to the country's security.

This study examines the interplay of transnational Islamic thought and organizations with local practices of Islam in Bangladesh. The impact of these interactions on Bangladesh, and the responses of Bangladeshi society and the state to these transnational-local exchanges are explored to see whether changes have taken place in the common understanding of religion, and how those changes have influenced Bangladesh's socio-political and conflict dynamics. Drawing on these analyses, the study attempts to map the trajectories of religio-political ideas and forces in Bangladesh.

In particular, the study seeks to answer the following specific questions:

- Which transnational Islamic/Islamist<sup>134</sup> groups and movements have a significant presence in Bangladesh?
- What are the primary conduits through which transnational Islamic influences are spread in Bangladesh?
- Does the presence of transnational Islamic/Islamist organizations influence the dynamics of local conflicts?

In light of policymakers' growing concerns over the transnational scope of Islamist politics, answers to the above questions will provide specific information regarding the nature and scope of transnational networks and local Islamic practices in Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim-majority country of the world.<sup>135</sup> As opposed to the current security-centric and generalized understanding that all transnational networks constitute a blanket threat to global security, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of the political and social milieu within which these movements are operating in Bangladesh.

The assessment of the country's socio-political and conflict dynamics will help to identify the key actors and drivers of transnational Islam in its pietistic (i.e., movements underscoring personal devotion, piety, and spirituality), Islamist and militant variants. As this paper demonstrates, comprehension of these diverse actors' and movements' specific roles within Bangladesh's socio-political ecosystem is imperative to identify those entities which pose a real threat to security and, consequently, to devise more specific and directed policies to alleviate these threats.

Following this introduction, the paper is divided into six sections. The first section comprises a background of the country, especially highlighting the interplay of religion and politics since Bangladesh's inception in 1971. This historical narrative demonstrates that, despite declaring secularism as a state principle and limiting the role of religion in politics, the Bangladeshi state in its early days failed to address the latent tension between the idea of secularism and the role of Islam in society. After 1975, Bangladesh's military rulers seized upon this tension and brought Islam into the political arena in order to gain political legitimacy. The paper's second section maps the various dimensions of lived Islam (i.e., Islam as practiced by various strata of society) in the country including the political arena. The author shows that Islam is variously understood and expressed by the people of Bangladesh. The third section briefly traces the historical antecedents of the interactions between local and transnational Islamic thought in Bangladesh to demonstrate that such interactions are not new to the country. This section also discusses the long-term impacts

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<sup>134</sup> Throughout this paper organizations which advocate religious revivalism as a mode of personal salvation and do not seek to use Islam as a mobilizational tool for political objectives are described as Islamic organizations; while those organizations that view Islam as a political ideology with specific goals related to political and social changes are referred to as Islamist.

<sup>135</sup> Almost 89% of Bangladesh's population adheres to Islam. Bangladeshi Muslims are predominantly Sunni, but a small number follow the Shia tradition. The largest religious minority of the country is Hindu, comprising 9% according to the 2001 census. Christianity and Buddhism are also followed by a very small segment of the population.

of these interactions, and demonstrates that the most positive impact of these interactions has been the strengthening of the country's syncretistic<sup>136</sup> tradition, while the most negative impact has been the spread of sectarianism.

The responses of society and the state in recent years to transnational Islam are the focus of the paper's fourth section. It is argued that the state has facilitated—whether by choice or its inability to oppose them—the entry of both pietistic organizations, like the Tabligh Jamaat (TJ), and militant organizations, like Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI), into the country. The societal responses to the influence of transnational ideas and organizations have been mixed, as this section also shows.

The content of transnational Islamic/Islamist messages and the diverse strategies employed to propagate them are discussed in the paper's fifth section. As this section shows, transnational Islamism insists on a global Muslim identity and presents the *umma* (the global Muslim community) as a political community of faith. The popular conduits for the transmission of transnational Islam's message in Bangladesh include satellite television and DVDs, on the one hand, as well as local oral traditions, on the other.<sup>137</sup> New modes of communication, such as *halaqa* (informal study groups), have also been popularized in recent years.

Finally, this paper presents possible future trajectories of transnational Islam in Bangladesh, drawing policy implications from the paper's central findings. The author argues that the interactions between transnational and local Islam will not be unidirectional, nor will they traverse one single trajectory. Furthermore, global and domestic political developments will influence these trajectories as much as the strengths of the forces involved.

## Background

Bangladesh emerged as a secularist state in 1971 as the result of a decade-long linguistic nationalist movement and a long brutal war against Pakistan. The most significant element of the nationalist movement that brought Bangladesh into being was the replacement of religion with ethnicity as the primordial marker of identity. The country framed its constitution in 1972, incorporating secularism as one of the four state principles in the constitution, while proscribing the use of religion in politics.

The declaration of secularism as a state principle, in theory, consigned religion to the private realm, and therefore did away with the mix of religion and politics. However, the meaning of “secularism” remained vague to both the ruling elites and the common masses. The government soon began undercutting the spirit of secularism through an array of activities including broadcasting religious programs on the state-controlled media. Political leaders also began using religious expressions in their speeches. The country joined the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and the Islamists who had collaborated with the Pakistani Army in its genocidal war against the Bengali population were pardoned through a general amnesty.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Syncretic here refers to the incorporation of local cultural practices which are not attached to conventional Islamic rituals and practices, especially those found in the Arabic-speaking Muslim world.

<sup>137</sup> The Internet, which has become a major conduit in many parts of the world in transmitting Islamist ideology and thoughts, is not a significant mode of transmission in Bangladesh. Given its limited reach within the country, Bangladeshi Islamists have yet to harness the potentials of the Internet.

<sup>138</sup> The decision came after all Pakistani military personnel, including 195 charged with war crimes, were handed over to Pakistan as a result of an agreement between India and Pakistan. The government also faced pressure from the international community, particularly Muslim countries, not to prosecute the members of the Pakistani Army and their local supporters.

At the same time, many socio-religious organizations in the country continued propagating religious messages and events tied to religion were celebrated. Not only did the tradition of *waz mahfils* (public scriptural commentary) and *urs*<sup>139</sup> continue, the government allowed the madrassas (Islamic seminaries), particularly of Deobandi persuasion, to impart Islamic education despite the nationalization of education. The education commission, appointed to devise a uniform education system, recommended the maintenance of religious educational institutions (REIs) and religious studies within the mainstream curriculum in its 1974 report.

A latent tension between the idea of secularism and the role of religion thus remained within Bangladeshi society. The absence of a clear understanding of secularism had an important role primarily in maintaining, and perhaps intensifying, this tension.

Islam gained a more visible role in the public arena after the demise of the Awami League government headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.<sup>140</sup> The military regime of Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) brought changes to the state principles, replacing secularism with “absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah,” and allowing the religion-based political parties to participate in the political process. The regime also directly encouraged religious activities, befriended Islamists, and incorporated religious education as part of the school curriculum.

The government also insisted on the Muslim identity of the Bangladeshi population as opposed to their ethnic identity.

A closer relationship with Muslim countries in the Middle East and Gulf became the hallmark of the country’s foreign policy under Ziaur Rahman. These steps were taken further by Ziaur Rahman’s successor, General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who usurped the state power in 1982 through another coup. The Ershad regime, in its bid to gain political legitimacy, declared Islam the state religion in 1988.

One of the defining features of the Ziaur Rahman and Ershad regimes was their belief in the role of Islam in public life and in politics. These regimes succeeded in bringing Islam into the country’s political discourse and strengthened the legitimacy of Bangladesh’s Islamists—both constitutionally and politically.

A latent tension between the idea of secularism and the role of religion thus remained within Bangladeshi society. The absence of a clear understanding of secularism had an important role primarily in maintaining, and perhaps intensifying, this tension.

<sup>139</sup> *Urs* is the celebration of the anniversary of the death of Sufis or saints by devotees at the saint’s shrine.

<sup>140</sup> Mujibur Rahman, his close associates, and most members of his family were brutally killed in a *coup d’etat* in 1975.

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# Transnational Islam in India: Movements, Networks, and Conflict Dynamics

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the events of 9/11, transnational Islamic forces have consolidated more along religious lines with regional and local Islamic outfits to further the extremist cause worldwide. South Asia has been confronting the challenge of Islamic extremism for many years and in varied forms. Among the South Asian countries worst hit by Islamic extremism, India, with a Muslim minority population numbering over 140 million, has cradled a number of important transnational Islamic movements throughout history. As this paper shows, many of these movements have tremendous influence on present-day Islamic radicalism and grassroots activism all over the world. This paper argues that India's Muslims have largely shunned Islamic violence and radical influences, though perceived marginalization and insecurity among this minority community could prove a potential source for radicalization.

### MAIN FINDINGS

While many Islamic movements arising from India remain local in influence, others have spread across the world, primarily through immigration and the Indian diaspora, missionary activities, and pilgrimages to Mecca. The roots of India's Islamist challenge can be traced to late nineteenth century India where the seeds of dominant reformist and revivalist movements were implanted, namely: the Deoband, Tablighi Jamaat, Ahle Hadith and Jamaat-i-Islami. In due course, these movements have transcended the political boundaries of the subcontinent and manifested in both violent and pietistic forms at home and elsewhere. The key principle which drives India's transnational Islamic movements (with the exception of Sufi mystic movements) is the establishment of the imaginary *Ummah* through either violent or other (e.g., conversion) means. Unlike other parts of the world where the transnational Islamic movements are intense, only a small section of India's Muslims is believed to be endorsing radical Islam, though the numbers are increasing. While India's Muslims have largely shunned Islamic terrorism, there is evidence of Indian Muslims contributing to international terrorism. Increasingly, Indian Muslim youth are talking about the plights of fellow Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, and neighboring Pakistan. Indian blogospheres and social networking websites are full of these instances. India's leading radical Muslim youth movement and increasing source of concern is the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and its off shoot, Indian Mujahedeen.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- In India, the drive to implement *shari'a* has never been as intense as in Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, a sense of insecurity has long gripped India's Muslims. Future policy should monitor and address this perception of marginalization.
- A small section of India's Muslims—homegrown jihadists—has taken to terrorism and has acquired international links in recent times. Terrorism among Indian Muslims appears to have originated following the Babri mosque demolition in 1992. Since then, the potential for homegrown terrorism has grown extensively throughout the country.
- The changing Islamic political landscape in neighboring Bangladesh and Pakistan, where terrorist outfits have political parties with overt ties to transnational movements and networks, and the resurgent Islamic violence in the region will likely dictate the future trajectories of transnational Islam in India.

Islam in India unfolds a bewildering diversity of Muslim communities and no statistical data can be framed to determine their location and assess the multiple streams of thoughts existing within them.<sup>183</sup>

This paper traces the emergence and growth of major transnational Islamic revivalist and militant movements and networks in India. While outlining their influence and geographical spread, the paper attempts to assess the degree of dialogue, interaction and confrontation occurring within and between these movements which have dominated India's Islamic landscape for over a century. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of their sphere of influence, the paper examines the flow of ideas, resources and, most importantly, future trajectory of these movements and how they are shaped by contemporary circumstances inside India.

In particular, the paper addresses some specific questions about the Islamic movements in India: What role do transnational Islamic movements play in a country where Muslims are a minority? Which movement is playing a dominant role in shaping the Islamic space? To what degree do these movements fuel inter- and intra-religious understandings and conflict in India? To what extent do these movements play a role towards building a unique Islamic identity in the country? How do regional and wider geopolitical events influence the growth or decline of Islamic movements in India? The above set of research questions addresses at least three concerns for policymakers about transnational Islam in its Indian context; the study thus: 1) locates the dominant and emerging Indian Islamic movements with transnational reach and influence; 2) provides a clear understanding of various transnational Islamic movements and networks, which are not always quietist, in the Indian setting; and 3) identifies the ideological and operational convergence of contemporary militant and activist Islam in India.

This paper demonstrates how emphasis on orthodox Islamic practices and intra-religious rivalries between Indian Islamic movements play a significant role in jeopardizing efforts to build a Muslim "community of believers" as originally conceptualized by the Islamic movements and networks. Further, this paper observes that not all movements in India are pietist or quietist, as movements like the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Ahle Hadith are actively involved in subversive and sectarian activities. Additionally, the paper explores the connections among both activist and militant strains of Islam in India, as well as the groups' relations with

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<sup>183</sup> Mushirul Hasan, "Religion, Society and Politics during the Nehruvian Era: Profiling India's Muslim Communities," *Third Frame: Literature, Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (2008): 95.

their foreign counterparts. Finally, the paper notes that these movements are not following a single trajectory at present, but future convergence is possible.

Following this introduction, the paper is divided into six sections. The first section defines and traces the emergence of transnational Islamic revival and reformist movements in India, while briefly assessing the current status of Muslims in the country. The following three sections focus on five major Indian Islamic movements and networks—the pietist Deoband, Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), and Ahle Hadith (AH); the Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and its Indian offshoot, the Jamaat-i-Islami Hind (JIH); and, finally, the militant Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI)—paying special attention to their connections with contemporary circumstances. The fifth section discusses the various dimensions of the cooperation and confrontation occurring within and between these and other emerging movements (e.g., the Tablighi Jamaat vs. the Dawat-i-Islami) and shows how these Muslim actors interact and maneuver to dominate India’s Islamic space. The sixth and concluding section highlights common traits shared by these groups, and summarizes the current state of affairs with regard to the Islamic movements and their future direction.

## Transnational Islamic Movements and the Status of Muslims in India

Transnational Islam<sup>184</sup> in India has been the focus of intense intellectual debate since the late twentieth century due to its controversial links to “Islamic” terrorism and violence. The nineteenth century witnessed fundamental changes in Islamic thought worldwide, especially in Cairo, Tehran, Damascus and Istanbul. The shift was reflected in almost all aspects of the Islamic intellectual debate ranging from issues of identity, the state, tradition, jurisprudence, rituals and practices.<sup>185</sup> Precisely during that time, the seeds of many dominant Islamic reformist and revivalist movements were implanted on Indian soil and many of those movements have alleged influence on present-day Islamic militancy and grassroots activism the world over. Most of these Islamic movements have been influenced either by internal reform movements, e.g. anti-Sufi Wahhabi and Salafi movements,<sup>186</sup> or arose in the face of rising neo-Hindu and Bhakti (devotional) movements in India.

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<sup>184</sup> Post-9/11 research has attempted to map the intricate anatomy of Islamic movements, which have largely aimed to spread and strengthen Islam by transcending political boundaries. In the context of Islam as a transnational religious practice, Bowen emphasizes three basic and characteristic phenomena: 1) demographic movement; 2) transnational Islamic institutions; and 3) Islamic reference and discourse crossing political boundaries. See John R. Bowen, “Beyond Migration: Islam as a Transnational Public Space,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 5 (2004): 879-894. While demographic movements do not necessarily trigger revivalist or reformist movements, the latter two trends seem to have contributed to the transnational communication of ideas and practices which in turn promotes transnational socio-religious movements. Scholars have argued that the process of globalization has been one of the prime motivators and fuelling factors for transnational social and religious movements.

But it is imperative to note that religious ideas and thoughts have transcended geographical and political boundaries since the emergence of religion and are not a new-age phenomenon as they are sometimes thought to be. Broadly, we may term this phenomenon as “transnationalism” which means socio-religious ties and interactions linking people or institutions through the continuous exchange of ideas, people and material, notwithstanding the presence of national borders. These “movements-sans-frontiers” invariably focus on the global interactions that occur during the course of engagement and not necessarily with single power centers, but with multiple hubs favoring local socio-political conditions.

<sup>185</sup> For an excellent overview of these changes, see Basheer M. Nafi, “The Rise of Islamic Reformist Thought and its Challenge to Traditional Islam,” in *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Suha Taji Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 28-60.

<sup>186</sup> Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006), 256.

The political and socio-religious setting of the nineteenth century forced Indian Muslims to shift their attention towards the Prophet Mohammed again, and away from the medieval Sufi<sup>187</sup> saints, shrines and Islamic clerics. To name some of the important Indian Islamic movements and networks, among others which will be studied below, there are the Deoband movement, Tablighi Jamaat, Ahle Hadith, and the Jamaat-i-Islami which, in due course, transcended the political boundaries of the subcontinent and manifested in both violent and pietistic forms at home and elsewhere. While many Islamic movements that arose from India remained local in influence, others have spread across the globe primarily through immigration, diaspora contacts, missionary activities and pilgrimage.

The key principle which drives many of these Islamic movements, except Sufi/shrine-centric mystic movements like the Suhrawardiya and Chistiyya, is supposedly the establishment of the imaginary *ummah* (community of believers) through either violent or other (e.g. conversion, proselytization) means. Many commonalities can be seen among these various movements in varying degrees on questions related to Muslim personal law, language (Urdu in South Asia), and sectarian and communal violence targeting Muslims.

Demographically a minority, the Muslim population in India feels rather safe and secure under India's constitution and largely supports the secular concept of the Indian state and India's composite culture.

Unlike other parts of the world where Islamic activism is intense, this activism is relatively moderate in India. Demographically a minority, the Muslim population in India feels rather safe and secure under India's constitution and largely supports the secular concept of the Indian state and India's composite culture. The overt drive to implement *shari'a* (Islamic law) has never been as intense in India as in neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh. Since independence, the Indian government has allowed its minority Muslim citizenry to follow *shari'a* in civil life and does not promote the majority Hindu religion and practices. However, despite this, the sense of minority insecurity<sup>188</sup> has gripped the Muslim community since the vivisection of the subcontinent after the departure of British and, perhaps, much before that.

Islamic revivalism appeared in the Indian subcontinent when Muslim power waned at the hands of the British colonial powers. Soon after, the ideas of Shah Waliyu'llah<sup>189</sup> and Shah Abdul Aziz gained ground and their ideas of an Islamic state galvanized Muslims into movements like

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<sup>187</sup> At least 14 Sufi orders operated in India during the time of Mughal Emperor Akbar (d. 1605), but only four of them have survived into the 20th century: Firdawsiya, Suhrawardiya, Chistiyya and Zaydiya. The Sufi decline came when the Sufis came under severe attacks from orthodox Muslims and Islamic clerics in the absence of monarchical patronage to mystic or popular pietistic Islam. See Gopal Krishna, "Piety and Politics in Indian Islam," in *Muslim Communities of South Asia: Culture, Society and Power*, ed. T.N. Madan (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 331-364.

<sup>188</sup> Even though Muslims feel secure in India, their confidence has been largely shaken by the rise of right-wing Hindus and militant groups who have challenged Indian Muslims' "loyalty" to the land, questioning their true allegiance, and increasing communal violence targeting the Indian Muslim community.

<sup>189</sup> G.N. Jalbani, *Teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi* (Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1967). Also see M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967).

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# Transnational Islam in Indonesia

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Indonesia is generally associated with a peaceful and tolerant form of Islam. The recent rise of militant Islamist groups in post-Suharto Indonesia, however, and the alleged links of some of these groups to the Southeast Asian terrorist network, the Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), raises concerns. This paper assesses the current status of transnational Islamist discourse in Indonesia, in general, and Indonesian Islamist militant groups, in particular, examining their impact on Indonesia's socio-political and conflict dynamics. Indonesian Islam is seen as increasingly infused with transnational Islamist currents and activism arising from a global Islamic awakening. The paper argues that Islamist militants do not currently pose a significant threat to Indonesia's security as many have shifted their strategy of violent jihad toward nonviolent Islamic missionary work and grassroots "Islamization from below."

### MAIN FINDINGS

The collapse of Suharto's regime and Indonesia's transition towards democracy gave impetus to the emergence of various Islamists groups competing for the liberated public sphere. The most radical among these groups—such as the Front Pembela Islam (FPI), the Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), the Laskar Jihad (LJ), and the Jamaah Islamiyah (JI)—rejected participation in the existing system, calling instead for violent jihad. The radical and militant groups' success waging jihad in Indonesia's conflict areas paralleled the phenomenal development of the Islamist media in the country, which played a crucial role in disseminating propaganda and directing public opinion. The pressures of the Indonesian government and pro-democracy Muslim groups against violent Islamist discourse and jihadist activism, however, have gradually forced the transnational Islamist groups to leave behind their high profile politics and shift towards a strategy of implementing the *shari'a* from below at the grassroots level. No longer seeing violent jihad as a relevant means for realizing their goals, many groups now argue that *da'wa* is more appropriate to foster Indonesian Muslims' awareness of their duty to uphold the supremacy of the *shari'a*. These groups also believe that nonviolent endeavors are more suitable to Indonesia's current situation and crucial to defend Muslim solidarity and the long-term struggle for a comprehensive Islamic order.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Organizationally, Indonesia's transnational Islamist groups are largely broken; their leaders and members are mired in debates and conflicts. However, as social movements, embedded in interpersonal networks and informal nodes of activism, they retain deep roots and visions of establishing an Islamic state. Some seek to consolidate themselves by fanning the flames of sensitive Islamic issues, but they have to first confront the Indonesian government and the pro-democracy alliances that firmly reject jihadism.
- The one hope for the militant jihadists depends on the mushrooming *da'wa* groups which designate Indonesia's youth as the main target for Islamizing society at the individual level. Although such groups seemingly delegitimize the jihadists' struggle, their growing influence among youths no doubt broadens the Islamist constituencies that can potentially be drawn into the jihadist orbits. This is especially so if the state and civil society forces fail to demonstrate their commitment for good governance and accountability and systematically campaign for democracy and human rights.

Home to the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has generally been associated with a peaceful and tolerant form of Islam and even perceived as a country developing into the most pluralist and democracy-friendly nation-state in the entire Muslim world. The rise of militant Islamist groups in post-Suharto Indonesia, however, calling for jihad and other violent actions, raised concerns. Underlying these militant groups' demands for the comprehensive application of the *shari'a* (Islamic law) was skepticism of the existing system that, they claimed, had created the opportunity for a global Zionist-American conspiracy to alter Indonesia's course to becoming an Islamic state. No doubt, the growing influence of radical Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia has raised questions about the way Indonesian Islam has increasingly become infused with the transnational Islamist discourse and activism arising from a pan-Islamic awakening and global jihadism.

Scholars argue that unprecedented global flows of people, ideas, cultures and civilizations are currently modifying conventional conceptions of world politics and calling into question the hegemony of nationalist and statist forms of political identity. Expressions of Islam and politics taking place in the particular context of the nation-state can thus no longer be isolated from new transnational forms of political organization, mobilization and practice which are coming into being through globalized political and social spaces.<sup>249</sup> It is therefore appropriate to examine how the related patterns which are emerging out of this situation affect the current dynamics of Indonesian Islam and shape the multiplicity of its expressions and appearances.

Following a brief historical background charting the rise of transnational Islamist currents in Indonesia, this paper turns to assess the current status of Indonesia's key Islamist militant groups, examining their internal organization and impact on Indonesia's socio-political and conflict dynamics. The paper devotes particular attention to the Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Front of the Defenders of Islam), the Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI, Indonesia's Party of Liberation), the Laskar Jihad (LJ, Jihad Paramilitary Force), the Laskar Mujahidin Indonesia (LMI, Indonesian Holy Warrior Force), and the Jamaah Islamiyah (JI).

Expressions of Islam and politics taking place in the particular context of the nation-state can thus no longer be isolated from new transnational forms of political organization, mobilization and practice which are coming into being through globalized political and social spaces.

<sup>249</sup> See Azza Karam, *Transnational Political Islam: Globalization, Ideology and Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004); and Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Next, this paper analyzes the grassroots and nonviolent missionary strategies Indonesia's transnational Islamist groups have adopted to adjust their discourse and activism to local contexts and changing circumstances. Pressured by Indonesia's pro-democracy Muslim alliances and the Indonesian government, these groups' room to maneuver has narrowed. The Islamists have been forced to shift their strategy towards the implementation of the *shari'a* from below. While the Islamists intensify outreach activities, *da'wa* movements have emerged designating Indonesian youths as their main target. Implicit in this strategic shift is the transnational Islamists' attempt to prolong their existences and retain their final dream of creating an Islamic state through varying tactical means.

Following its discussion of "Islamization from below," the paper examines the equally important Islamist media in Indonesia which continues to play a significant role in disseminating Islamist ideology and influence. The paper then presents concluding remarks incorporating significant policy implications.

## Historical Background: The Rise of Transnational Islam in Indonesia

Most of the leaders behind Indonesia's transnational militant organizations are young Islamists who became acquainted with various transnational ideas and experiences through their interactions with members of the global *umma* (or Muslim community). Some of them participated in the global jihad in Afghanistan where they made contacts with jihadist fighters from different parts of the world and explored ideas and ideologies in an environment based on the ethos of jihad. This experience stimulated their spirit of combat as well as their militant opposition to what they perceived as the Western-inspired secular tyranny threatening the Muslim world. Extolling the slogan *al-amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an'l-munkar* (a Qur'anic phrase meaning "enjoining good and opposing vice"), they sought to frame their discourse and activism by placing the domestic issues of Indonesian Islam more coherently within the context of global conflicts in the Muslim world. The emerging Islamists groups attempted to mobilize their members to stage protests against what they claimed to be the enemies of Islam who were perceived as destroying the supremacy of the *shari'a*.

The rise of transnational Islamist actors that actively call for jihad can also be seen against the background of the rise of Saudi Arabia as the main political player in the Muslim world and this country's promulgation of Wahhabism as a major plank of its foreign policy. Clothed in the language of Islamic solidarity, piety, and brotherhood, Saudi Arabia ran its campaigns by distributing money for the construction of mosques, Islamic schools, as well as funding *da'wa* activities for Islamic organizations all over the world. In Indonesia, Saudi Arabia supported the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII, Indonesian Council of Islamic Proselytizing) which served as a staunch ally of the *Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami* (World Islamic League) in executing Saudi Arabia's campaigns in Indonesia.<sup>250</sup> Saudi Arabia set up the Institute for the Study of Islam and Arabic (LIPIA) in Jakarta in 1980.

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<sup>250</sup> Despite its historical linkage with Indonesia's first and largest Islamic political party, Masyumi, the DDII preferred to focus on *da'wa* activities as a strategy to extricate itself from Suharto's pressure. On the basis of strategic considerations too, the DDII designated university campuses as one of the most important *da'wa* targets to disseminate Islamist ideas, provide a model for Islamic activism, and sponsor projects for building mosques and Islamic centers. DDII's ideas were borrowed from the Jamaat-i-Islami's Abul A'la al-Mawdudi (1903-1979) and the Muslim Brotherhood's Sayyid Qutub (1906-1966), among other Islamist ideologues.

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 challenged the central position of Saudi Arabia. The revolution provided a blueprint for the establishment of an Islamic state and encouraged students to observe their Islamic obligations. Saudi Arabia worked to contain the threat of revolutionary Islamic activism arising from the Iranian revolution by intensifying the spread of Wahhabism. This situation provided a precondition for the growth of transnational Islamist ideology in Indonesia. Alongside the slogan of “Islam is the solution,” the concept of *jahiliyya*, or ignorance, as interpreted by Qutb quickly gained wide currency. Qutb’s interpretation prompted Islamists to resist the established order.<sup>251</sup> In the second half of the 1970s, various uprisings and terrors in the name of Islam in fact flared up in a number of Indonesian provinces as a protest against Suharto’s determination to marginalize political Islam.

The return of Middle Eastern graduates and Afghan War veterans gave a remarkable boost to the expansion of transnational Islamism in Indonesia. The impact of these individuals on the established Indonesian Muslim organizations, such as the modernist Muhammadiyah, al-Irsyad, and Persis, and the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), cannot be underestimated. Cadres that had completed their studies in the Middle East and who had undergone their baptism in the Afghan war criticized their own organizations, which they perceived as having lost their reformist spirit, having grown preoccupied with politics and managing schools, orphanages, and hospitals.

Challenges posed by the “globally experienced new reformers camp” sparked debates and polemics among the organizations, which were increasingly forced to adjust their discourse and activism and not to limit

themselves to domestic issues and concerns. These organizations were also demanded to support efforts to transform Indonesia into a fully Islamic society by intensifying *da’wa* activities. Although many *‘ulama* and religious teachers affiliated with the organizations were aware that the transnational Islamist actors might challenge their established religious practices, they hardly refused the Islamists’ legitimacy as *da’wa* partners to struggle for the glorification of Islam (*syi’ar Islam*) in Indonesia.

Emphasizing that what happens in Indonesia is directly connected to the perceived global crisis in the Muslim world, the groups presented the shari’a, khilafa (caliphate) system and jihad as the only solution to curb the ongoing crises afflicting Indonesia.

## Jihadist Activism after Suharto

The efflorescence of transnational Islamist discourse and activism in the final years of Suharto’s New Order regime provided the foundation for the explosion of militant Islamist groups in

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<sup>251</sup> According to Qutb, the concept of *jahiliyya*, which originally referred to the period before Islam, accurately described the situation of the Muslim populace under the nationalist regimes as being in a state of ignorance and barbarism. See Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh*, trans. Jon Rothschild (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

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# Transnational Islam in Malaysia

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores the diverse ways in which transnational Islam—and, in particular, the connection of Malaysia's independent, non-state Islamist movements to transnational Islam—impacts Malaysia's socio-political terrain. The paper gives particular attention to Malaysia's key broad-based ideological, Sufi-pietist and radical-militant Islamist movements, assessing their transnational affiliations and influences. The paper argues that transnational Islam in Malaysia is more fluid and dynamic in its non-state configurations which are characterized by efficient organization, innovative techniques and a wide pool of potential transnational partners. Although Islamist movements have become more focused on Malaysian-oriented issues and discourses, none has denied the utility and need to retain their transnational dimensions.

### MAIN FINDINGS

Malaysia enjoys a rich history of transnational contacts with the Islamic world, which has influenced the development of its indigenous culture and plural society. While Malay-Muslims lay more importance to their Islamic rather than Malaysian identity, they are comfortable living alongside people of other faiths. This successful negotiation, along with Malaysia's racial and religious diversity, has earned the "moderate" label for Malaysian Muslims. Islamism and rising Islamic consciousness, thus, do not necessarily foster radicalism or hostile ethnic relations in the country. Extensive transnational linkages have been a primary factor for the government's powerlessness to curb or effectively monitor Islamist activities in Malaysia. While all Islamist movements have traces of transnational and, in particular, Middle Eastern influences during their germinating phases, as Islamists gain experience through interactions with the state, they tend to gravitate toward more Malaysia-oriented positions. Radical-militant movements are new to Malaysia's Islamist scene, which has been almost devoid of militant insurrection on a realistic scale. However, the possibility of Islamism in Malaysia assuming a militant expression cannot be ruled out. The Malaysian state has been commended for its vigilance in tackling the root causes of terrorism so as to obviate such a possibility. Malaysia has pushed for multilateral cooperation among Southeast Asian countries in combating terrorism under the Kuala Lumpur-hosted Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT).

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The Malaysian government would do well to integrate the Islamists' transnational contacts into the mainstream. The government should not regard these transnational actors as a challenge to its ability to host foreign Islamic dignitaries who are often used to legitimize the state's brand of Islam and Islamization.
- Friendly foreign governments such as the United States would actually benefit the Malaysian government by helping to bring these transnational Islamists into the mainstream, rather than associating them with the terrorist threat.
- However, taking into account the strong anti-American sentiment in Malaysia, even among ruling elites, U.S. statements supporting the Malaysian government's policies on Islam and Islamists actually do more harm than good. Such open support divests the government and its policies of public legitimacy. U.S. support should thus remain covert.

The rising profile of Malaysia as a prosperously developing and yet fervently Islamic country necessitates a study of the dynamic interaction between its local political imperatives and transnational Islamic variables. Such a study reveals that transnational Islam forms an integral aspect of contemporary Islamism in Malaysia. In the era of the global “war on terror,” however, official quarters discourage transnational influences in the country, cautioning against independently driven external channels and media. The only transnational nexus which can safely be flaunted without drawing suspicion or outright resistance is the economic network. This paper views transnational Islam in Malaysia from a wider perspective, with equally serious attention given to non-economic and non-governmental channels of transmission and exchange.

Although Malaysian Islamist movements have over the years become more focused on Malaysian-oriented issues and discourses, none has denied the utility and need to retain its transnational dimensions. Independent Islamist<sup>289</sup> groups involved in transnational Islam in Malaysia may be broadly categorized into broad-based ideological movements, Sufi-pietist movements and radical-militant Islamist movements. This paper elaborates on these groups and movements, foregrounding their transnational character. As the paper shows, the transnational linkages of these movements are strengthened by the transmission of ideas, finances, logistical support, and manpower.

After briefly discussing the historical currents of transnational Islam in Malaysia, this paper is divided into three main sections devoted to discussions of key Islamist groups within each of the categories outlined above. The paper first looks at the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), the Congregation for Islamic Reform (JIM), and the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) as representatives of broad-based ideological movements. The paper then turns to analyses of the *Jamaat Tabligh* and *Darul Arqam*, Malaysia’s leading Sufi-pietist movements. Taken together, the groups and movements of these first two categories constitute mainstream Islamism in Malaysia. The paper then focuses on the emergence of radical-militant movements in Malaysia, a relatively new phenomenon in the country, arising only over the past decade. The paper will examine the *Mujahidin Group of Malaysia* (KMM: *Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia*—sensationalized in Malaysia’s state-controlled media as *Kumpulan Militan Malaysia*, or the *Militant Group of Malaysia*), and the *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (HT). Following these discussions, the paper will present concluding remarks incorporating significant policy implications emerging from the paper’s central findings.

## Brief Historical Background

Since the establishment of Islam in Malaysia, Malays—the country’s indigenous and predominantly Muslim ethnic group—have maintained transnational contacts with peoples of Middle Eastern, Chinese, Indian and European origins. Historical accounts of the colonial period indicate that the British worried about the subversive implications of excessive contacts between the Malay-Muslims and their Middle Eastern brethren emerging. Instances of contact occurred through the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Malay graduates returning from Middle Eastern institutions of higher learning, and the migrant Arab communities who had intermarried with

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<sup>289</sup> Independent, or non-state, Islamism is understood here as sustained political action designed to establish Islam as the supreme creed of a polity and social order, while separately conceived and executed from any form of state-driven Islamization processes.

Malay-Muslims.<sup>290</sup> Pan-Islamist sentiments combined forces with Indonesian-imported anti-colonialism to produce the first stirrings of Malay nationalism, conceptualized around the ideals of a Greater Malaya (*Melayu-Raya*).<sup>291</sup> Among diehard Malay nationalists, enthusiasm for *Melayu-Raya* outlasted independence on August 31, 1957. Transnational Islam within the context of *Melayu-Raya* reached a crescendo with the 1965 arrest of opposition leaders from the

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Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS: *Parti Islam SeMalaysia*) for their alleged involvement in a high-level conspiracy to set up a pro-Indonesian government-in-exile in Karachi, Pakistan.<sup>292</sup>

At the official government level, prior to Dr. Mahathir Mohamad’s premiership (1981-2003), Islam never occupied a pivotal role in Malaysia’s foreign policy.<sup>293</sup> Afterwards, even as Islam seemed to assume an increasingly important position, as far as Malaysia’s international relations are concerned, transnational Islam has served the ruling elites’ domestic policy priorities more than

their overtly religious concerns.<sup>294</sup> One of Dr. Mahathir’s chief concerns was to appease, while not allowing the government’s Islamic legitimacy to be lost to emergent independent Islamists, many of whom were galvanized by the new wave of global Islamic resurgence and harbored connections with the burgeoning Islamist movements of the 1970-80s. Such Islamists seemed to have upstaged the government even where the government was expected to be more magnanimous, for instance, in alleviating the plight of less fortunate Muslim minorities, refugees and liberation fighters abroad.<sup>295</sup> The following discussion of these independent Islamists, particularly their networks and trends in relation to transnational Islam, forms the major thread of this paper.

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<sup>290</sup> Cf. William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 40-43; Anthony Reid, “Nineteenth Century Pan-Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 26 (1967): 270-271; Abdul Kadir Haji Din, “Economic Implications of Moslem Pilgrimage from Malaysia,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 4, no. 1 (1982): 60-63; William R. Roff, “The Meccan Pilgrimage: Its Meaning for Southeast Asian Islam,” in Raphael Israeli and Anthony H. Johns (eds.), *Islam in Asia (vol. II: Southeast and East Asia)* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1984), 239; Fred R. von der Mehden, *Two Worlds of Islam: Interaction between Southeast Asia and the Middle East* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 4, 10, 15.

The prevailing impression in the Middle East, though, developed through centuries of inequitable interaction, is that Islam in Southeast Asia is popular and laden with indigenous accretions, in contrast with the scriptural and orthodox Islam of the Arabs. Such a lopsided view has been accentuated by the dearth of research institutes in the Middle East devoted to the study of Asia and Asians; see Mona Abaza, “More on the Shifting Worlds of Islam. The Middle East and Southeast Asia: A Troubled Relationship?” *The Muslim World* 97, no. 3 (2007): 419-436.

<sup>291</sup> Radin Soenarno, “Malay Nationalism, 1896-1941,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 1, no. 1 (1960), 8-10; Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 87-89.

<sup>292</sup> PAS party president Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy and vice-president Raja Abu Hanifah were held in detention without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Dr. Burhanuddin, who died shortly after regaining his political freedom in 1969, strenuously denied these allegations of treachery, as recently exposed by his private notes during solitary confinement in 1965. See Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, *Hari-hari Aku Dizalimi* (Batu Caves: PAS Gombak, 2006). The official document outlining the alleged plot is appended in pages 122-151.

<sup>293</sup> Mohamad Abu Bakar, “Islam in Malaysia’s Foreign Policy,” *Hamdard Islamicus* XIII, no. 1 (1990): 3-13.

<sup>294</sup> Shanti Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 5-11, 234, 270.

<sup>295</sup> Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, 220.

## Broad-Based Ideological Movements

In the Malaysian context, broad-based ideological movements may be run as either non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or political parties, but these movements are united by their invariable reference to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) and Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami for their sources of inspiration and doctrinal guidance.

### *Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM)*

The first group within this rubric is the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM: *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*), which was founded in 1971 and quickly established itself—by virtue of the size and composition of its support and the substantive causes it promoted—as the most credible Islamist NGO in the country.<sup>296</sup> ABIM's relationship with the Malaysian state has periodically shifted from being confrontational (1971-82); cooperative towards “problem-solving” (1982-91); involved as a “partner in nation building” (1991-97) and pressured for its pro-*Reformasi*<sup>297</sup> activism (1997-2005); to becoming pragmatically supportive of the state's agenda to safeguard Malay-Muslim hegemony within the context of the Federal Constitution (2005-present day).<sup>298</sup>

In the early 1970s, a significant number of ABIM's pioneers were postgraduates in the United Kingdom, where they forged close contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood diaspora, met and were counseled in person by the Jamaat-i-Islami's founder, Abul ala al-Mawdudi, and organized circles to study these ideologues' thoughts.<sup>299</sup> From its outset, ABIM has operated on the twin principles of *dakwah* and *tarbiyyah*—understood as a systematic educational process to build up mankind towards perfecting their role in this world as commissioned by God.<sup>300</sup> In both aspects, influences of the Muslim Brotherhood and Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami are conspicuous. For example, ABIM recommends to its members the daily recitation of *al-ma'thurat*, a collection of Quranic verses and prayer formulae commissioned by Hassan al-Banna, founder-leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. Intellectual education in ABIM comprehensively utilizes literature written by scholars identified with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamaat-i-Islami.<sup>301</sup> Such discipline is a regular feature of ABIM's *tamrin al-kadir* (cadre training) programs and *usrah* units.<sup>302</sup> In fact, today *usrah* is an established institution in official *dakwah* programs in Malaysian schools and institutions of higher learning.

<sup>296</sup> Judith Nagata, “The New Fundamentalism: Islam in Contemporary Malaysia,” *Asian Thought and Society* 5, no. 14 (1980): 136; John Funston, “Malaysia” in Mohammed Ayoob (ed.), *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 175; Mohamad Abu Bakar, “Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia,” *Asian Survey* 21, no. 10 (1981): 1045.

<sup>297</sup> *Reformasi* refers to the movement for social and political reform which grew out of *ad hoc* street protests and demonstrations held in support of former ABIM president Anwar Ibrahim, who was unceremoniously sacked from his positions as deputy prime minister and deputy UMNO president in September 1998, and later convicted and jailed on charges of corruption and sexual misconduct. Initially marshaled by two civil society alliances, viz. the People's Democratic Scheme (GAGASAN: *Gagasan Demokrasi Rakyat*) and the Movement of Justice for Malaysians (GERAK: *Gerakan Keadilan Rakyat Malaysia*), *Reformasi* assumed tangible shape in 1999 with the establishment of the National Justice Party (KEADILAN: *Parti Keadilan Nasional*), which merged in 2003 with the People's Party of Malaysia (PRM: *Parti Rakyat Malaysia*) to form the People's Justice Party (PKR: *Parti Keadilan Rakyat*). Formally led since its inception by Anwar's wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, PKR has since the March 8 elections been the largest opposition party in Parliament.

<sup>298</sup> Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, “Islamist Realignments and the Rebranding of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no. 2 (2008): 225-232.

<sup>299</sup> M. Kamal Hassan, “The Influence of Mawdudi's Thought on Muslims in Southeast Asia: A Brief Survey,” *The Muslim World* 93, nos. 3-4 (2003): 432-434.

<sup>300</sup> Mohammad Nor Monutty, *Perception of Social Change in Contemporary Malaysia: A Critical Analysis of ABIM's Role and its Impact Among Muslim Youth*, Ph.D. dissertation (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1989), 212, 231.

<sup>301</sup> Mohammad Nor Monutty, *Perception of Social Change in Contemporary Malaysia*, 234-239.

<sup>302</sup> *Usrah* is another concept borrowed from the Muslim Brotherhood which literally means “family” but technically refers to “a small unit comprised of five to twenty members headed by a leader known as the *naqib*, which meets weekly or once every two weeks to study and foster Islamic brotherhood among themselves.” Mohammad Nor Monutty, *Perception of Social Change in Contemporary Malaysia*, 240.

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# Transnational Islam in the Philippines

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper describes significant state and non-state conduits of transnational Islam in the Philippines and examines how they have influenced the contemporary conflict dynamics of the country. The paper pays particular attention to the Moro resistance movement in the southern Philippines, observing that the Moros have legitimate grievances as a result of discrimination and the dispossession of their ancestral domains. The paper argues that transnational Islamic propagation activities have heightened the Islamic consciousness of Philippine Muslims, largely encouraging their struggle for self-determination.

### MAIN FINDINGS

Though Spain established a dominant Christian community in the major parts of the Philippine archipelago (1565-1898), many Muslim communities in Mindanao remained unconquered. Although political integration programs during U.S. rule of the Philippines (1901-1935) were implemented, including the establishment of a Moro Province, Philippine Muslims were seen as a minority. The long-term result of this minority status among the Moros was a sense of marginality and, ultimately, rejection of the Philippine nation-state. The confluence of transnational Islamic trends following Philippine independence deepened Moro Islamic consciousness while strengthening Moro nationalist sentiment. Transnational Islamic ideas and support inspired Muslim groups in the Philippines to continue their struggle against the Christian-dominated Philippine government. Leaders who resented the oppression of Muslims in the country have established armed resistant groups like the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Other resistant groups and personalities, however, remain unarmed, preferring the path of peaceful change. However, these “peaceful” groups have a complex relationship with the armed groups that confounds the conflict dynamics between Muslims and Christians in the country. Both state-affiliated and non-state transnational Islamic players also complicate the situation by introducing fundamentalist and extremist ideologies that encourage the Moros in their struggle. Among the transnational Islamic groups active in the Philippines, the Tabligh Jamaat has the largest following. The Tabligh Jamaat is often accused of serving as a cover for Muslim extremists to propagate militancy in the country. The Southeast Asian regional terrorist organization, Jemaah Islamiyah, poses the greatest threat to the security of the Philippines.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The Philippine government lacks a coherent and nuanced understanding of transnational Islam, as it tends to simply equate transnational Islam with terrorism.
- Unless the Philippine government can win the hearts and minds of the Moros through effective governance and a nuanced strategy, the conflict in Mindanao will likely continue. This conflict could possibly spillover into Malaysia, while facilitating the movement of transnational militants between these two countries.

This paper examines transnational Islam<sup>434</sup> in the Philippines and its implications for the country's security. Paying particular attention to the ongoing Moro insurgency in the southern Philippines, the paper identifies significant state and non-state conduits of transnational Islam in the country, describing their modes of operation and the impact of their activities and ideologies on the country's conflict dynamics. In light of this discussion, the paper also examines the historical transnational Islamic influences that have fostered the rise of Islam and Islamic sentiment in the Philippines.

The paper argues that transnational Islamic propagation activities have heightened the Islamic consciousness of Philippine Muslims, largely encouraging their continued struggle for self-determination. The paper shows that the Philippine government does not have a coherent and nuanced understanding of transnational Islam, as it tends to simply equate transnational Islam with terrorism. Thus, this paper urges for the government to develop a more effective and nuanced strategy to resolve the ongoing Moro insurgency and Christian-Muslim antagonism that threatens the country's stability.

To address these issues, the paper is divided into three sections. The paper's first section describes the evolution and rise of Islam and Islam's transnational currents in the Philippines. The next section examines some of the key contemporary conduits of transnational Islam in the Philippines and assesses their impact on the country's conflict dynamics. Specifically, this section analyzes the role of Malaysia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran as state conduits of transnational Islam in the Philippines, observing how these state players have affected the dynamics of the ongoing Moro rebellion. This section then assesses the Tabligh Jamaat (TJ), the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and significant Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), the International Relief and Information Center (IRIC), the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission (IWWM), the Markazzo Shabab Al-Islamiyah (MSI), the Fi-Sabilillah Da'wah and Media Foundation (FSDMF), and the Islamic Studies, Call

The paper argues that transnational Islamic propagation activities have heightened the Islamic consciousness of Philippine Muslims, largely encouraging their continued struggle for self-determination.

<sup>434</sup> The concept of transnational Islam was first introduced by Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy to describe a feeling of "growing universalistic Islamic identity" shared by Muslim immigrants and their children who live in non-Muslim countries. See Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); and Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). Also see Roy's *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). This "growing universalistic Islamic identity" is cemented by the idea of the Islamic *ummah* (community of Muslim believers), which is not only matter of personal faith among Muslims but a shared and socially constructed reality that strongly connotes religious solidarity and social identification beyond ethnic, national and regional boundaries.

Transnational Islam as used in this study refers to Islam's border-crossing activities through state and non-state conduits. The advancement in travels and information communication technology in the era of globalization facilitates the rise of transnational Islam, which is also part of the general rise of transnational religious players in international relations that challenge the Westphalian concept of state sovereignty. See Jeff Haynes, "Transnational Religious Actors and International Politics," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2001): 143. Also see Susanne H. Rudolph and James Piscatori (eds.), *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997). Deeply informed by the *ummah*, Muslims everywhere are expected to be concerned with fellow Muslims. The concept of *da'wah* (to invite), which is the cornerstone of Islamic propagation worldwide, reinforces the transnational character of Islam. The Islamic propagation activities across national borders of Muslims inspired by the concept of the *ummah* and motivated by the principle of *da'wah* are manifestations of Islam's transnational character.

and Guidance Philippines (ISCAG)—as representatives of key non-state conduits of transnational Islam in the Philippines. The paper’s third and final section discusses the security challenges posed by transnational Islam in the Philippines and the state’s responses to these threats.

### *Evolution and Rise of Islam in the Philippines*

The Philippines has a Muslim population of approximately 5 million, out of the country’s total estimated population of 90 million. The vast majority of Muslims are found in the southern Philippines, particularly in the provinces of Sulu, Basilan, Maguindanao and Lanao Del Sur, though small Muslim communities are also established in Luzon and Visayas. The dominant religion in the Philippines is Christianity, which was introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Spain. Islam, however, came to the Philippine archipelago two centuries ahead of Spanish colonialism.

### *The Coming of Islam (and Christianity) to the Philippines*

There is a very limited understanding of Islam’s historical role in the Philippines due to the lack of reliable archeological information and credible historical accounts from the pre-colonial period.<sup>435</sup> To date, the most authoritative source explaining the spread of Islam in the Philippines is Cesar Majul’s book, *Muslims in the Philippines*.<sup>436</sup> In this book, Majul argues that the coming of Islam to the Philippines was a function of the general expansion of Islam in Malaysia.<sup>437</sup> Majul contends that Arab traders and Islamic preachers, who married or converted the area’s native inhabitants, became the propagators of Islamic faith in the archipelago.<sup>438</sup>

Islam spread rapidly in Mindanao in the 1470s through the zealous Islamic propagation activities of Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuwan who initiated the creation of the Maguindanao Sultanate in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>439</sup> From Mindanao, Islam gained its foothold in Manila, through the leadership of Rajah Solaiman, as well as in Cebu, through the leadership of Rajah Humabon and Rajah Lapu-Lapu. In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, Islam, through the missionary work of Bornean preachers, had effectively gained ground in Batangas, Bonbon, Cagayan, Catanduanes, Laguna, Mindoro, Palawan, Pampanga, and other villages in Luzon and Visayas.<sup>440</sup> With the spread of Islam in the Philippines, the archipelago was said to have become part of the *ummah*, or the worldwide Muslim community.

In 1492, Spain defeated the Moorish kingdom after almost 800 years of Muslim rule. The Spanish victory against the Moors allowed Spaniards to spread the Catholic faith to other parts of the world until it reached the Philippines in 1521 through the leadership of Ferdinand Magellan.

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<sup>435</sup> Najeeb Saleeby made a pioneering study of Islam in the Philippines; however, Saleeby’s work has been heavily criticized by contemporary scholars for his limited knowledge of Islamic institutions and jurisprudence, and for his failure to take into account the external circumstances that allowed the introduction of Islam into the Philippines. For examples of Saleeby’s work, see Najeeb M. Saleeby, *Studies in Moro History, Law and Religion* (Manila: The Filipiniana Book Guild, 1905). Also see Najeeb Saleeby, *The Moro Problem: An Academic Discussion of the History and Solution of the Problem of the Government of the Moros of the Philippine Islands* (Manila: E.C. McCullough & Co., 1913).

<sup>436</sup> Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, (new ed., Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1999).

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>438</sup> With Islam becoming a cherished faith in Malaysia, it expanded to the neighboring Philippines through the island of Sulu where Islam obtained its original foothold. An Arab trader-preacher known as Tuan Mashaika was believed to have founded the first Muslim community in Sulu in the early 14th century by marrying the daughter of a local ruler called Rajah Sipad. But it was only in 1380 that the first mosque was constructed in the Simunol Island of Sulu through the initiative of an Arab trader, Makdum Karim (a.k.a. Sharif Awliya), who converted a number of natives to Islam. In 1390, Rajah Baguinda sustained the Islamic propagation of Karim. By the middle of the 15th century, the Sulu Sultanate was established with Syed Abubakar, who originated from Saudi Arabia, as the first crowned Sultan.

<sup>439</sup> Ruurdje Laarhoven, *The Maguindanao Sultanate in the 17th Century: Triumph of Moro Diplomacy* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1989).

<sup>440</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation under Endless Tyranny* (Kuala Lumpur: IQ Marin SDN BHD, 1999), 9.

Native Philippine Muslim leaders like Rajah Lapu-Lapu resisted the intrusion of Magellan. In 1565, Spain sent another expedition to the Philippines headed by Miguel Lopez de Legaspi. Through Legaspi, Spain colonized the Philippines, which, at that time, was experiencing a gradual transition from local animist practices to Islamic belief.

### *Islamic Resistance under Colonial Rule and Foreign Occupation: The “Moro Problem”<sup>441</sup>*

When Spain arrived, 98% of the inhabitants in Mindanao were Muslims. Spain observed a “Moorish” practice of the inhabitants and called them Moros. Spanish colonizers attempted to control Mindanao but to no avail. However, Legaspi succeeded in controlling Manila then headed by a Muslim leader, Rajah Solaiman. Muslim leaders in Mindanao continued their resistance against the Spanish conquistadores. The legacy of Spanish Catholicism as defended by the Spanish colonial forces inevitably produced immense hostilities between Muslims and Christians in the Philippines.<sup>442</sup> Spanish colonial rule of the Philippines lasted from 1565 to 1898. Though Spain established a strong and dominant Christian community in the major parts of the archipelago, many Muslim communities in Mindanao remained unconquered.<sup>443</sup> Spain referred to Moro resistance as the “Moro problem,”<sup>444</sup> but the Moros themselves described it as the “Filipino Christian Problem.”

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During the U.S. colonial rule of the Philippines (1901-1935), the Americans inherited the so-called Moro problem.<sup>445</sup> It was during the American period when the “minoritization” of Muslims in Mindanao occurred.<sup>446</sup> Although political integration programs were implemented during the American period with the establishment of a Moro Province, Muslims in the Philippines were seen as a religious and cultural minority, the long-term result of which was a feeling of marginality among Philippine Muslims, dissatisfaction and, ultimately, the Muslims’ rejection of the Philippine nation-state.<sup>447</sup>

<sup>441</sup> Some portions of this section are drawn from Rommel Banlaoi, “Radical Muslim Terrorism in the Philippines,” in *Handbook on Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Andrew Tan (London: Edward Elgar Publishing, Limited, 2007).

<sup>442</sup> See John Pelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959). Also see T. J. S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (New York, Melbourne, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>443</sup> Samuel K. Tan, “History of the Mindanao Problem,” in *The Road to Peace and Reconciliation: Muslim Perspective on the Mindanao Conflict*, ed. Amina Rasul (Makati City: Asian Institute of Management, 2003), 5.

<sup>444</sup> For the central government in Manila, the Moro problem means that Mindanao does not wish to be incorporated and assimilated into the colonial government or nation-state called the Philippines. Shinzo Hayase, *Mindanao Ethnohistory Beyond Nations: Maguindanao, Sangir, and Bagobo Societies in East Maritime Southeast Asia* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007), 134.

<sup>445</sup> For an excellent account of Muslims in the Philippines during the American colonial rule, see Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos, 1899-1920* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983).

<sup>446</sup> Vic Hurley, *Swish of the Kris: The Story of the Moros* (New York: EP Dutton & Co., 1936).

<sup>447</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*, 143.

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# Local Networks and Transnational Islam in Thailand (with emphasis on the southernmost provinces)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper assesses the impact of transnational Muslim networks on the social, political, and conflict dynamics of Thailand. By observing three key transnational Islamic networks—the Muslim Brotherhood-influenced Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT), the Jemaat Tabligh, and the Salafi-Reformist network—this paper finds a tremendously fluid and dynamic Muslim terrain in southern Thailand, where representations of Islamic creed, legitimacy, and authority are increasingly contested. The paper also provides an in-depth look into the transnational dimensions of the contemporary Muslim-based resistance in the southern provinces. Here, the paper argues that there is little substantive evidence of any sustained penetration of the southern Thailand conflict by transnational militant groups.

### MAIN FINDINGS

The past two decades have witnessed a proliferation of new sources of religious authority and norms in Muslim Thailand, particularly in the southern Muslim-majority provinces. These new Islamic groupings and alignments not only serve religious functions, but are also transforming social and cultural institutions as well. The authority of the traditional religious establishment in southern Thailand is gradually eroding as the terrain of Islam in the country is increasingly shaped by a proliferation of modern and transnational forces. These transnational groups and networks are not only engaging with traditional local forces but also among themselves, thereby enlarging the kaleidoscope of Muslim networks and influences in the country. Notwithstanding the weakening of traditional religious monopolies and the pluralization of ideas, imported ideological influences have hardly been adopted wholesale. Instead, one witnesses constant processes of negotiation as these ideas and practices are localized, thereby adding to the dynamism of the socio-religious terrain. By and large, the Thai state has sought to accommodate Muslim networks as they are not seen as a threat to its political legitimacy. As a matter of fact, many of the key Islamic groups active in Thailand, such as the YMAT or the Jemaat Tabligh, are quietist in political orientation. Other Islamic groups, such as the Salafi-Reformists, are lending support to the state and bolstering its credibility in Muslim eyes. As of yet, there is no evidence that these groups or any other major transnational Muslim networks are involved in the current violence and militancy in the southern provinces.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Because of the weakening of traditional religious monopolies and the diffusion of religious authority, any attempt to engage Muslim leaders, groups, and movements in southern Thailand will have to tread carefully so as not to marginalize or alienate pivotal players.
- Given the continued importance of traditional Islam to matters of culture and identity in southern Thailand, the inevitable repercussions from the erosion of authority, precipitated by the “new” forms of belief and practice, have to be managed carefully.
- Considering the very complex dynamics that define transnational-local networks in Thailand, any attempt at neat categorization will, at best, be arbitrary. Policymakers would benefit by dealing with issue-specific cases rather than generalized categories of groups and movements.

The global religious space that Muslims in Thailand inhabit—not just through the abstract notion of the *ummah* but, more importantly, through the movement and networks of Muslims over many centuries—has always played a critical role in shaping Islamic thought and practice in the country. In many ways, Thailand stands at the interstices of Islam’s encounters with the Far East. Though the advent of Islam in Thailand can be traced back as early as the eighth century, it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the religion flourished as Persian traders brought Shi’a Islam to Bangkok and the plains.<sup>530</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, ethnic Yunnanese (Haw) Chinese Muslims, fleeing persecution by the Qing Dynasty, settled in northern Thailand’s Chiang Mai region via the mountains of the Golden Triangle and added to the kaleidoscope of Islam in the country.

In Thailand’s southern border provinces, Islam began commanding strong adherence as the southern kingdom of Patani gravitated into the orbit of the Malay World (*Dunia Melayu*) and underwent an Islamization process together with the Malay sultanates of Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu. Owing to these distinct geographical roots of penetration, it is not surprising to find that, notwithstanding some degree of overlap, the phenomenon of Islamization in southern Thailand has in many ways taken on different forms of expression as compared to other regions of the country.

Notwithstanding the historical salience of external influences on Islamic faith and creed in Thailand, little has been written (apart from the fine work of Alexander Horstmann and Ernesto Braam on the Jemaat Tabligh) on the transnational nature of contemporary Islam in the country. The purpose of this paper then, is to reflect on the transnational dimensions of the complex and heterogeneous nature of Muslim identities and communities in Thailand by providing a preliminary assessment of key transnational Muslim networks in the social and political dynamics of the country.

This paper argues that one must look at the relationship between transnational religious forces and “local Islam” in Thailand to better understand the influence of transnational Islamic forces in the country. This relationship of transnational and local forces must be seen against the backdrop of the globalization of ideas, the diffusion of religious authority, and the extent to which external religious influences are contesting local religious and cultural boundaries. Along these lines, the

This relationship of transnational and local forces must be seen against the backdrop of the globalization of ideas, the diffusion of religious authority, and the extent to which external religious influences are contesting local religious and cultural boundaries.

<sup>530</sup> For a discussion on Islam’s penetration into Siamese society, see Andrew D. W. Forbes, “Thailand’s Muslim Minorities: Assimilation, Secession, or Coexistence?” *Asian Survey* 22, no.11 (November 1982).

paper observes that the monopoly of traditional religious authority is eroding as power, influence, and legitimacy are becoming more dispersed across Thailand's Muslim community.

To better understand this situation, the paper examines three key transnational Islamic networks operating in Thailand—the Ikhwanul (i.e., Muslim Brotherhood) influenced Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT), the Jemaat Tabligh, and the Salafi-Reformist network. The paper assesses the agenda and methods of these networks, as well as their evolving roles and the structures and conduits through which they operate. The paper examines these groups' origins, their ideologies and activism, local responses to their activities, their links to external actors, networks, and countries, and their relations with the state. Because the vast majority of Muslims in Thailand are geographically concentrated in the provinces of Patani, Yala, and Narathiwat, these border provinces will form the geographical focus of the paper.

In its final section, the paper assesses the extent to which transnational actors and forces have influenced or shaped the ongoing violence in Thailand's southern provinces. The paper concludes with a discussion of the current status of transnational Islam in Thailand, including relevant policy implications emerging from the paper's key findings.

## Young Muslim Association of Thailand

The Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT) is one of the most active and well-connected Islamic organizations in Thailand.

### *Origins*

Young Muslim Association of Thailand was established on October 13, 1964 by a small group of Muslim businessmen and university students in Bangkok. Its founder was an army officer, Colonel Udom Tappawatana, and its first president was Damrong Samutcojorn. Since Damrong, YMAT has had twenty presidents. The current president is Nikmanasay Sama-ali, a director from a Thai public school in Patani and resident of Yala province, one of the three Malay-Muslim majority provinces in the south. Since 1997, the president of the organization has been a southern Thai Malay-Muslim.

YMAT's roots are modest—it began as a small Muslim community club modeled after the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) that met regularly to discuss a range of social issues confronting Thailand's Muslim community. Beyond these meetings, the activities of the early YMAT also included participation in mosque-based programs. These low-key and community based activities soon gave way to more prominent forms of activism. Influenced by the global Islamic resurgence in the mid-1970s, YMAT began to imbibe much of the Ikhwanul-style social activism taking place in Muslim societies across the world which was modeled after the Ikhwanul Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood), the Egyptian mass-based social and political movement. In many ways, this “awakening” was further facilitated by the climate of democratization which had engulfed Thailand in the wake of the pro-democracy student movements of the mid-1970s.

The objective of this heightened activism was to “strengthen the faith and religious identity” of Muslims across Thailand.<sup>531</sup> At this time, YMAT's popularity within Thailand also expanded exponentially as it drew into its membership ranks many Thai Muslim students returning from

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<sup>531</sup> Interview with Abdul Roziz Kanie, Phuket, May 25, 2008.

tertiary education institutions across the Islamic world. Needless to say, these students formed yet another critical conduit for the influx of reformist and Ikhwanul-based ideas through the lectures and talks, community outreach programs, and “summer camps” they organized.<sup>532</sup> The organization’s renaissance reached its apex in the 1980s, when, according to one of its senior leaders, YMAT “reached out to Muslim civic and social leaders and Muslim politicians. We (the YMAT leadership) urged them to embrace Islam in their social activities and succeeded in many respects. We encouraged the Muslim voters to vote for Muslim candidates who are actually practicing their faith.”<sup>533</sup>

### *Ideology*

Despite its formation a decade earlier, it was in the mid-1970s, when YMAT’S *aqidah* (faith) was firmly anchored on the global Islamic resurgence, that the organization developed a strong ideological blueprint. Inspired, as noted above, by the ideals of the Ikhwanul Muslimin, as well as an increasingly active Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia or Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) under the effervescent leadership of Anwar Ibrahim, YMAT premised its social activism on the belief that Allah had revealed Islam to Muslims to guide them in their lives. To that effect, the message underlying YMAT activism was that the revelation of Islam was not a matter to be confined to the realms of personal faith but, rather, that it informed a Muslim’s conduct in the social, political, and economic spheres as well since Islam was the only ideology necessary for Muslims to navigate and surmount the problems confronting humankind.<sup>534</sup>

Apart from the works of prominent Ikhwanul thinkers such as Hassan al-Banna and Rashid Rid’a, the radical ideas of Mu’ammar al-Qaddafi and Maulana Maududi also exerted strong intellectual influence on YMAT’s leadership, although Anwar Ibrahim came into increasing prominence as the relationship with ABIM strengthened.<sup>535</sup>

While YMAT’s social activism was generally accepted, their attempt to transmit some of the ideas underpinning their work was met occasionally with some degree of suspicion. One of the most controversial examples was YMAT’s attempt to translate the work of Sayyid Qutb (specifically, *Milestones*) into the Thai language, a move that was frowned upon by government authorities. The following recollection of a member of the YMAT Advisory Council of the controversy surrounding the translation of Qutb’s work is illustrative of the gulf in perception between YMAT and the Thai government:

They (the Thai government) only wanted to see the militant side of Qutb and his language of revolution. But we saw a moral message in his work. The Thai authorities didn’t understand that Qutb’s work was a response to the problem in the Arab society. We, on the other hand, were not interested in carrying out a revolution. We are a minority, religiously speaking, in this country. The Arab Muslims were the majority in the Middle East and Qutb’s message was in response to their predicament. We don’t view ourselves as some immigrants coming here to profit from the land. In other words, we don’t challenge the

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<sup>532</sup> Interview with Saravud Sriwan-nayos, Bangkok, May 27, 2008.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> Interview with Nikmanasay Sama-ali, Yala, May 24, 2008. The YMAT’s motto “Islam is the way of life,” reflects this fundamental principle of the organization. See <http://www.ymat.org>.

<sup>535</sup> See Raymond Scupin, “The Politics of Islamic Reformism in Thailand,” *Asian Survey* 20, no.12 (December 1980): 1233; M. Kamal Hassan, “The Influence of Mawdudi’s Thought on Muslims in Southeast Asia,” *The Muslim World* 93 (July/August 2003).