



Radicals March on Indonesia's Future

by *Sadanand Dhume*



ON APRIL 17, an estimated 200,000 slogan-chanting protesters—the men in white, the women in headscarves—converged upon the heavily guarded U.S. Embassy in Jakarta. Speakers castigated the U.S. for supporting Israel. Banners held aloft in the crowd accused the U.S. and Israel of being “the real terrorists.” Others proclaimed the protesters’ readiness to free (from Israel) the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, Islam’s third holiest site. Similar processions wound their way simultaneously through other Indonesian cities, including Surabaya in East Java and Makassar in South Sulawesi.

Wire services reported the Jakarta protests as the largest in years, but what made them remarkable was not their size but their timing. They came a week after a senior leader of the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas had called upon Muslims around the world to protest a planned dem-

onstration at al-Aqsa by Jews dedicated to reclaiming the site. The mosque occupies the most sacred spot in Judaism, the site of the ancient Temple of Solomon.

How does an appeal by a Palestinian in Jerusalem translate a week later into hundreds of thousands of people jamming the streets of downtown Jakarta? It’s a question that can’t be answered without examining the group behind the protests, the Justice and Prosperity Party. In the seven years since it was founded, the Justice Party has emerged as the best organized political force in the country. In 1999, it attracted less than 1.5% of the vote and won a meager seven seats in parliament. By last year, its share of the vote swelled to nearly 7.5%; with 45 seats it’s the seventh largest party in the 550-seat parliament.

The Justice Party has built its following

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on a reputation for incorruptibility, a record of social work and an attachment to Islamic causes. Less known is the fact that it draws its ideology and organizational structure from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the group whose ideas spawned, among others, Hamas, Sudan's National Islamic Front and, most famously, al Qaeda.

Until now the Justice Party has attracted much less international attention than Jemaah Islamiyah, the al Qaeda offshoot headed by jailed Muslim preacher Abu Bakar Baasyir. Jemaah Islamiyah stands for suicide bombings, the Justice Party for peaceful protests. Yet both subscribe to the same fundamentally antimodern worldview. And in the long term, the Justice Party poses the greater threat to Indonesia's tradition of pluralism, its stability and its prospects for economic growth.

'Islam Is the Solution'

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD was founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, a school teacher who believed that Islam was not merely a religion, but a way of life. Its ideology is encapsulated in the Brotherhood's slogan: "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Koran is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."

The Brotherhood's most influential thinker was the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). In 1948, Qutb, then an official in the Egyptian Ministry of Education, was sent to the U.S. to study for a master's degree in education. In Greeley, Colorado, the small town where he lived, there were no bars; hemlines fell well be-

low the knee. But to read Qutb you would think he had stumbled upon the set of *Desperate Housewives*.

He interpreted the manicured lawns of Greeley as evidence of insatiable American greed. He saw the entire country as soulless, materialistic and depraved. As for Jews, they were a craven and slavish people who couldn't grasp the idea of a life with dignity. They were to blame for materialism (Marx) and sexual permissiveness (Freud). Worst of all, they were the sworn enemies of Islam: "History has recorded the wicked opposition of the Jews to Islam right from its first day in Medina."

After returning to Egypt in 1950 Qutb quickly became the Brotherhood's principal ideologue. For him, as for Islamists everywhere, God's laws (*sharia*) were superior to man's laws. The answer to all of society's problems lay in Islam. It belonged not merely in the mosque, but in the classroom and the boardroom; in banks, in courts, in movie theaters. Qutb reinterpreted the Arabic word *jahiliyya*, traditionally used by Muslims to describe the ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabs, to describe Egypt's secular rulers. He wrote his most influential book *Milestones* (sometimes called *Signposts on the Road*) for a vanguard of Muslims, men animated by the spirit of the Prophet and his seventh century companions, and committed to the establishment of an Islamic state.

Jihad for such a cause was noble. For Qutb, those who died in the cause were not truly dead; their actions outlived their bodies. Not surprisingly, the Brotherhood came into conflict with Egypt's secular government. Qutb was accused of plotting

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to assassinate President Nasser and hanged in 1966. Many followers, including his younger brother Muhammad Qutb, fled to Saudi Arabia, where they were welcomed by a monarchy flush with petrodollars and eager to add intellectual heft to its own premodern ideas of Islamic purity.

Muslim Brothers founded the University of Medina and swelled the faculties of other Saudi universities. Muhammad Qutb's most famous student was Osama bin Laden. Another of Mr. bin Laden's teachers was Abdullah Azzam, a Jordanian member of the Brotherhood widely revered by Islamists as the architect of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan.

Saudi money gave Sayyid Qutb's ideas a platform. Students from South and Southeast Asia, many on Saudi scholarships, poured into its universities. At the same time, Saudis and other like-minded Arabs funded mosques, *madrassas* (Islamic boarding schools) and universities throughout the Muslim world.

From Hindus to Hajjis

ON THE FACE of it, Indonesia was unpromising ground for a movement anchored in the certainties of seventh century Arabia. After Islam took root in the 14th century, Allah had to keep company with the likes of Dewi, goddess of the rice paddy; Nyai Loro Kidul, Queen of the South Seas; and Nini Tawek, the angel of the Javanese kitchen. Most Indonesians took pride in their past, in the civilization that built

Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist monument, and in the Majapahit empire, a Javanese Hindu kingdom whose influence stretched to present-day Cambodia.

Moreover, Islam was by then already a civilization in global decline. By the early 1500s, Portuguese gunships had entered Southeast Asian waters. A century later the Dutch established their headquarters on the site of today's Jakarta. The triumph of European arms and technology meant that Islam did not enjoy the long political supremacy in Indonesia that it did in the rest of the Muslim world.

In 1945, following a three-year occupation by the Japanese during World War II, Indonesia declared independence from the Dutch. Sukarno, the country's preeminent freedom fighter and first president, was a secular nationalist. He helped scuttle an early Islamist attempt to force Muslims to follow Islamic law. Instead, the new nation adopted the doctrine of Pancasila, which guarantees the equality of the country's five recognized religions: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism and Protestantism. The constitution offers no special place to Islam, the professed faith of almost nine out of ten Indonesians.

In 1966, amidst claims of an attempted communist-backed coup—and the subsequent annihilation of the largest communist party in the noncommunist world, 500,000 suspected leftists killed in five months—Sukarno was eased aside by General Suharto. The new ruler replaced socialism with market economics, and a tilt

toward Beijing and Moscow with one toward Washington. But he did little to tamper with Sukarno's secular nationalism.

To many devout Muslims, President Suharto's regime was, if not anti-Muslim, at the very least un-Islamic. Mr. Suharto prided himself on his knowledge of Javanese philosophy and sometimes retreated to a remote cave to meditate. He banned religious symbols in campaigning for the sham national elections held every five years to legitimize his rule. He picked a Christian to head the army. In the mid-1980s, Mr. Suharto decreed that all organizations—including Islamic ones—had to adopt Pancasila as their *only* ideology.

Beneath the surface, however, Indonesian society had begun to change. Rapid economic growth brought literacy and health care, factories and foreign investment. But it also spurred migration and urbanization, and with them came bars and discotheques, drugs and rampant prostitution. Paranoid about a communist comeback, the Suharto regime had instituted uniform religious education in schools. At the same time mosques and schools bankrolled by oil-rich Arabs propagated what they considered a purer, more authentic, version of the faith, adding heft to a home-grown movement called Muhammadiyah that had long pursued similar goals.

By the mid-1980s, the piety became visible. In kindergartens, Arab names began to replace Sanskrit names. In offices, the greeting *assalamu alaikum* vied with the religiously neutral *selamat pagi* (good morning). More women donned the headscarf. Prayers five times a day, fasting during Ramadan and the *hajj* pilgrimage

ceased to be oddities.

In the 1990s, perhaps in acknowledgment of these social changes, perhaps seeking to balance the power of an army whose support he could no longer take for granted, President Suharto reached out to Islam. He backed the creation of a high-profile association of Muslim intellectuals, an Islamic bank and an Islamic newspaper. He allowed the editor of a popular tabloid to be jailed for daring to publish a readers' poll of most admired figures in which the Prophet Mohammed placed a lowly 11th. He donned the simple white robes of a pilgrim and flew to Mecca, television crews in tow. Some called it the first ever *hajj* by a reigning Javanese king.

After the Asian financial meltdown, which saw Mr. Suharto step down in May 1998, the advent of democracy was supposed to bring back peace and prosperity. Instead, it created an anything-goes atmosphere. A volunteer army called Laskar Jihad shipped hundreds of machete-wielding young men dressed in Arab robes to wage a holy war against Christians in the eastern province of Maluku. Another group, the Islamic Defenders Front, or FPI, made a habit of trashing Jakarta bars and discos.

Radical Islamic clerics such as Mr. Baasyir, who had fled overseas during the Suharto years, felt safe to return. Christmas Eve in 2000 was welcomed in nine cities with bomb blasts at churches that killed 19 people; two years later more than 200 died in the Bali bombings, the world's deadliest terrorist attack since 9/11. Both the Christmas Eve and Bali bombings were blamed on Jemaah Islamiyah. Under international pressure, Indonesia cracked down on the

organization, and Mr. Baasyir remains in prison today.

Thousand-Mile Journey

BY MOST ACCOUNTS Sayyid Qutb's ideas reached Indonesia only in the late 1970s. At the leafy Dutch-built campus of the Bandung Institute of Technology, one of the country's most prestigious universities, two activists linked to the Saudi-sponsored Islamic World League began indoctrinating small groups with Brotherhood materials. Like the Brotherhood, they organized in secret cells, each with a leader and between five and 15 members. They borrowed the Brotherhood word for these cells, the Arabic *usroh*, or family. Members met once a week to discuss Islam and to learn how to develop a proper "Islamic personality." They studied the works of al-Banna and Qutb. The movement itself was called Tarbiyah, Arabic for education.

In the 1980s Indonesia was rapidly urbanizing. Political life on campus was sharply curtailed. Many college students were the first in their families to acquire a higher education or, for that matter, to live in a city. The Tarbiyah movement quickly caught on. It gave its members a sense of purpose and dignity, simple ideas of right and wrong, a framework for understanding the changes taking place around them. From Bandung it spread to the rest of the archipelago. By the early 1990s it controlled student movements in virtually all of Indonesia's largest and most prestigious public universities.

By 1998, the first generation of Tarbiyah activists had risen to positions of influence

in the bureaucracy, in universities, in state-owned corporations. That year, with the end of the Suharto era, they emerged in the open with their own political party. They called it the Justice Party. Its symbol: a stalk of rice—Indonesia's staple food—flanked by two crescent moons symbolizing Islam. In 1999, the new party won only 1.4% of the vote, below the 2% threshold to participate in the next election. Undeterred, it simply sidestepped the law by changing its name to the Justice and Prosperity Party.

Acutely aware of the Brotherhood's suppression by the Egyptian army and fearing a similar backlash in Indonesia, the Justice Party has shied away from showing its Islamist hand too plainly. Instead, party leaders tend to couch their statements in ambiguity designed to calm Western and secular Indonesian fears while at the same time reassuring the party's base about its goals—the Islamization of Indonesian society culminating in the imposition of a state based on sharia.

Ask a Justice Party leader about amputating hands for thievery—the punishment practiced in Saudi Arabia—and he's likely to respond as the party's secretary-general, Anis Matta, did to *The Wall Street Journal*: "I'd have to cut off the hands of most Indonesians. Indonesia and Islam do not want that." The message to the outside world: We're really quite reasonable. The message to the party faithful: The country's not ready yet, but one day it will be.

In 2003, Hidayat Nur Wahid, then chairman of the party, co-authored an article for the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., titled "The Justice Par-

ty and Democracy: A Journey of a Thousand Miles Starts with a Single Step.” It’s hard for an outside observer to grasp the journey’s destination; it’s hard for anyone familiar with *Milestones* to miss it.

The Justice Party’s engagement with democracy has the blessing of today’s most prominent Muslim Brother, the Egyptian-born cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Mr. Qaradawi, who is barred from entering the U.S. for his espousal of violence, hosts an immensely popular talk show in Arabic on the Qatar-based television network Al Jazeera. He is considered a moderate, at least by Qutb’s standards, which is to say he backs suicide bombings against civilians in Israel and attacks on Americans in Iraq, but condemned the 9/11 attacks.

Unlike Qutb, Mr. Qaradawi believes that democracy and Islam are compatible, or that democratic means can be used to pursue Islamist ends. He has visited Indonesia several times over the last twenty years and is quoted in the Justice Party’s founding manifesto. Though few Indonesians watch Al Jazeera, translations of Mr. Qaradawi’s shows and books are widely available.

Cell Phones and Headscarves

THE JUSTICE PARTY’S top leadership is steeped in Brotherhood ideology. Mr. Nur Wahid, who resigned from the party chairmanship last year to take over as the leader of Indonesia’s highest legislative body, the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), holds a B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. from the Brotherhood-founded University of Medina in Saudi Arabia. Party Secretary-Gen-

eral Matta graduated from the Jakarta branch of Riyadh’s Al-Imam Muhammad bin Saud University, described by the International Crisis Group, a think tank headquartered in Brussels, as having close links with the Brotherhood.

The Justice Party is the only cadre-based party in the country; their strength has grown to 300,000 in 2003 from 60,000 in 1999. These well-trained party workers tend to be younger and better educated than followers of mainstream parties such as Golkar and PDI-P. Some of them have degrees from the U.S., England or Japan. Many are graduates from Indonesia’s top engineering and medical schools. In Justice Party circles, as in Indonesia in general, liberal arts are considered inferior to science, and the Tarbiyah movement is strongest in technical and scientific departments. As a result, party cadres tend to be technologically savvy, equally at home with text messaging and Web-site design.

The party takes its self-image as the party of moral reform seriously. In a land suffused with the smell of clove cigarettes, it’s virtually impossible to find a Justice Party member who smokes. While most women are still bareheaded, you won’t find a female party member without the headscarf. Sayyid Qutb despised gems and jewelry. Scour a room full of male Justice Party members and you won’t find a gold wedding band. When there’s a natural disaster, such as the tsunami that devastated north Sumatra in December, party volunteers are among the first at the scene, delivering emergency relief and setting up mobile medical clinics.

To be fair, many of those who join the

Justice Party are animated more by a desire to do good for their faith and country than by a blood-tinged fantasy of chopping off hands and stoning adulterers to death. In a country where the lure of public service often appears to be an air-conditioned Volvo and businessman-sponsored shopping sprees in Singapore, the Justice Party offers faith, morality and discipline.

Its legislators routinely donate a percentage of their salaries to the party. In contrast to the nepotism of other parties, advancement in the Justice Party depends on hard work and ideological commitment. And though female party members must cover their hair and stand behind men at party gatherings, it's also true that, proportionally, the party offered more parliamentary seats to women candidates than most others.

Idealism and public service are coupled with a flair for publicity. The party takes every opportunity to flaunt its anticorruption credentials. In 2003, the refusal by its legislators in South Sumatra to accept a hefty cash bonus out of government funds was widely reported. Before last year's parliamentary election, candidates signed pledges to refuse bribes. They campaigned on the slogan "clean and caring." As a consequence, there's very little serious debate in Indonesia about what the party means for the country's future. Christian-owned newspapers have long been cowed by Islamist street power. Mainstream journalists, urban and lower middle class like the Justice Party, tend to be sympathetic.

For all its efforts to moderate its image, the Justice Party has not been able to distance itself entirely from violence. Mr. Nur

Wahid and other party leaders are among Mr. Baasyir's most vocal supporters. Once you get away from the party elite at Jakarta headquarters, the language becomes even less circumspect. Paranoia about Jewish bankers and Freemason plotters, Chinese tycoons and Christian crusaders is rampant among the party rank and file. The U.S., of course, is evil incarnate.

The popular weekly magazine Sabili, sold outside mosques all over the country, acts as the party's de facto mouthpiece. It propounded the theory that the Bali bombing was the work of a missile fired from a foreign ship. A few months later it named Mr. Baasyir its man of the year. During the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Maluku, Sabili called for jihad and backed it by publishing relevant verses from the Koran. Some of the magazine's propaganda is picked up from Middle Eastern Web sites.

Marchers Versus Bombers

THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT'S biggest success in Indonesia has been in setting the terms of debate. In reality, there's a lot less separating Jemaah Islamiyah and the Justice Party than is generally known. Like Jemaah Islamiyah, in its founding manifesto the Justice Party calls for the creation of an Islamic caliphate. Like Jemaah Islamiyah, it has placed secrecy—the cell structure both groups borrowed from the Brotherhood—at the heart of its organization. Both offer a selective vision of modernity, one in which Western science and technology are welcome, but Western values are shunned. The main difference be-

tween them is not of goals, but of methods. Jemaah Islamiyah is revolutionary; the Justice Party is evolutionary.

Yet, while Jemaah Islamiyah garners the headlines, the Justice Party poses a far larger threat to Indonesia. With its attacks on hotels and embassies Jemaah Islamiyah has set itself up for a confrontation with the government that it cannot hope to win. No state tolerates that kind of violence and anarchy. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak's government crushed the violent Islamist groups Gama'a Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad. The Algerian army did the same to its own proponents of Islamic terrorism. An uprising in 1982 by the Syrian branch of the Brotherhood led the government to flatten an entire city in retaliation.

In contrast, the Justice Party can use its position in parliament and its metastasizing network of cadres to advance the same goals incrementally, one victory at a time. By throwing its weight behind the likes of Mr. Baasyir, the party complicates the government's efforts to crack down on terrorists. At the same time it works tirelessly to propagate the Brotherhood's core beliefs. The party doesn't need to commit itself to violence. The more people who believe that the problem with society is too much modernity and not too little, the more who feel that a purified Islam is an answer to 21st century problems, the more who are angered by the sight of a bare female head or a bottle of beer, the more likely it is that hotheads among them will use terrorism to achieve their goals.

The Justice Party threatens Indonesia's hard-won economic development. Despite the web sites and the technical de-

grees, the party's outlook is anchored in personal piety and international Islamism rather than in public policy and the national interest. Instead of focusing on lifting Indonesians out of rice paddies and into factories and offices, the Justice Party remains preoccupied with combustible issues—forcing Muslim clerics into Christian schools, and protesting Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza.

Moreover, the party's beliefs fly in the face of what the rest of the world has learned about economic development—that you can't alleviate poverty without high rates of savings, openness to trade and investment, and female education resulting in lower birth rates. Like Islamists everywhere, Justice Party members oppose birth control on religious grounds. In a capital-starved country, the party doesn't exactly inspire investor confidence. Indonesia needs domestic capitalists—many of whom are Buddhist and Christian ethnic Chinese. It also needs foreigners—Singaporeans, Japanese, Americans and Koreans.

Businessmen might not have the inclination to pore over Qutb's writings or Mr. Qaradawi's *fatwas*, but they know there's a problem when the leader of a country's parliament is an outspoken supporter of a man widely believed to head al Qaeda in Southeast Asia. To put it simply, the more the Justice Party grows, the less competitive Indonesia becomes. While Vietnamese workers race to boost productivity, the Chinese practice their English and Indians pour into software training programs, the party's success sends the message that Indonesia's capital can be paralyzed by events in Gaza or Baghdad.

The Mall and the Mosque

LESS THAN A decade ago, Indonesia appeared likely to evolve as a Muslim version of Thailand—culturally self-confident, economically dynamic, comfortable with both an ancient past and a modern future. Today the odds favor an Indonesia that looks more like a Southeast Asian Pakistan—culturally confused, economically stagnant, caught between a modern elite and medieval clerics, a recipient of foreign aid rather than foreign investment.

Needless to say, the Justice Party is not the only hard-line Islamist group in Indonesia. But because it's easily the most powerful, its success or failure will be the most reliable bellwether of Islamic extremism in the country.

The party's road to power is unlikely to be smooth. Even optimists in the party don't think they have a realistic shot at the presidency or a majority in parliament before 2014. Despite their gains, Muslim fundamentalists in Indonesia—violent and nonviolent—remain a minority.

Most Indonesians feel no instinctive hostility toward modernity. Supermarkets stock beer; Ramadan sales include discounts on Capri pants; state-owned television is home to a weekly show called *Country Road*—90 minutes of Indonesians in denims and Stetsons line dancing, whirling imaginary lassos and crooning hits from deepest Texas and New Orleans. Sooner or later Indonesia's cultural pluralism—a cheerful acceptance of Taiwanese pop groups, Japanese Hello Kitty dolls and Bollywood movies—will run up against

the Justice Party's drab fidelity to Arab culture alone.

Second, more than one in 10 Indonesians is a non-Muslim. Thanks partly to the legacy of Pancasila, most Indonesians still see Catholic Javanese, Protestant Bataks and Balinese Hindus as equal citizens rather than as representatives of subservient faiths. Apart from secular Indonesians, religious minorities have the most to lose from the Justice Party's agenda; they will resist it the most fiercely.

Then there's the army. In the post-Suharto era, elements within it have supported Islamist violence, but the movement is too new to have penetrated it in any meaningful way. In the past the army has acted, like in Turkey, as the ultimate guarantor of the country's secular ethos.

Finally, the party faces an internal challenge. It needs to reach out to new supporters while maintaining both discipline and ideological coherence. This means devising ways to satisfy cadres without alienating less committed voters. Expect more anti-Israel demonstrations in front of the U.S. Embassy.

For now, however, the Justice Party is on the march. It faces an incoherent opposition and can count on the support of influential elements in the press and civil society. Tarbiyah groups continue to proliferate on campuses; the black and yellow party flag flutters in more and more towns across the country. For Sayyid Qutb's Indonesian heirs the journey of a thousand miles has just begun. What happens along the way will be the single biggest determinant of Indonesia's future. ■