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The JAD's Shift to Rumah Qurans: Implications for Security and Strategy

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SYNOPSIS

The Jama'ah Anshorud Daulah's shift in its education model from the pesantren to the Rumah Quran presents a challenge for counterterrorism efforts. While many Rumah Qurans offer invaluable Quranic education and serve their communities positively, others have been exploited by extremists to further radical agendas. Addressing this challenge requires a nuanced and balanced approach to ensure that security measures do not undermine the positive roles of many RQs.

COMMENTARY

The Jama'ah Anshorud Daulah (JAD), an Indonesian extremist group that once operated openly through traditional pesantrens (boarding schools), has now changed these schools to a more covert model: the *Rumah Quran* (RQ), literally meaning "Quran Homes". RQs are designed to provide focused Islamic education in local communities. They offer personalised Quranic instruction and foster a strong religious and community identity. For many Indonesian families, RQs are seen as a practical and cherished alternative to formal educational settings, where children can engage deeply with their faith in a nurturing environment.

However, the informal nature of RQs also makes them susceptible to misuse. JAD has shown how these seemingly benign educational spaces can be exploited for radical purposes. It is alarming that some RQs are now reportedly run by unreformed terrorists who use them as fronts to advance their extremist agendas. The Indonesian government has successfully shut down several JAD-associated pesantrens. However, the group's shift to RQs presents new challenges for tracking and countering radicalisation.

Regional Security Implications

Indonesia

As the epicentre of JAD's new strategy, Indonesia faces a complex situation. The government must enhance its surveillance and community engagement efforts while recognising and supporting many reformed jihadists' positive contributions. Collaborating with reformed JAD members like Adi Jihadi and Abu Qutaibah – who now publicly support Indonesia's Pancasila and reject ISIS narratives – could help undermine extremist ideologies. However, the challenge lies in correctly balancing stringent security measures with continuing support for beneficial RQs to avoid a community backlash.

Malaysia

With strong cultural and religious ties to Indonesia, Malaysia could see a spillover of JAD's radicalisation tactics. Historical instances of Malaysians travelling to Indonesia for bomb-making workshops highlight the potential risks. To address these concerns, Malaysia must strengthen inter-agency cooperation, enhance community outreach, and implement targeted monitoring of radicalised individuals. At the same time, it is crucial to ensure that regulatory measures do not inadvertently impact legitimate educational institutions.

Singapore

As a key regional hub, Singapore is vulnerable to risks posed by radicalised networks in Southeast Asia. These networks use social media to solicit funds, which may unintentionally support extremist groups like JAD. To counter this threat, Singapore must enhance its vigilance and proactive measures. The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) plays a pivotal role in rehabilitating former extremists and countering radical ideologies. Strong inter-agency cooperation is essential for effective monitoring and public awareness. Additionally, thorough vetting of financial support channels is necessary to prevent misuse.

Philippines

In the Philippines, which is already grappling with insurgency and extremist activities, the rise of RQs could exacerbate security challenges. Extremists might exploit RQs to gain influence in vulnerable communities. Reports indicate that some educators from Indonesian RQs previously associated with radical groups participated in the 2017 Marawi Siege on Mindanao island, highlighting the potential dangers of seemingly benign institutions. Strengthening local intelligence and focusing on community-based counter-radicalisation efforts are vital. The Philippines should develop region-specific strategies to address the unique challenges posed by RQs.

A Balanced Approach Needed

Differentiation and Targeted Monitoring

It is crucial to develop clear criteria to distinguish between RQs that provide valuable

educational services and those that pose security risks. This involves evaluating the curriculum, educators' backgrounds and institutions' affiliations. Implementing targeted monitoring strategies will help identify problematic RQs without disrupting beneficial ones.

Support for Beneficial RQs

Governments should provide resources, training, and guidance to RQs that offer positive educational experiences. This support can enhance the quality of education and safeguard these institutions from misuse. Engaging with local communities to promote transparency and encourage vigilance will help identify problematic RQs while supporting those that contribute positively.

Policy and Regulation

Effective regulation of RQs is essential to ensure they adhere to educational standards and not become breeding grounds for extremism. Policies should support the growth of good RQs while providing mechanisms to address any that may become problematic. It is essential to strike a balance between regulation and support to preserve the positive contributions of RQs.

Conclusion

The JAD's shift from pesantren to RQs represents a significant and complex challenge with broad regional implications. Recognising the positive role that many RQs play is crucial to avoid overdoing and preserving their beneficial impact. By implementing targeted monitoring, supporting valuable institutions, and fostering community engagement, Southeast Asian countries can address the threat of radicalisation while maintaining the integrity and positive contributions of RQs in the region.

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