

## The Internet in Indonesia: Development and Impact of Radical Websites

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*The Internet has become a crucial part of modern society's life due to its ability to facilitate communication and structure contemporary society. Indonesia has not been left out of this global phenomenon. The Internet came to Indonesia in 1983 and its usage has continued to expand ever since, especially within institutions of learning and in the government sector. The study of radical websites must be situated within the development of the Internet in Indonesia in general instead of being examined by itself. The impact of certain activities such as cyberterrorism must then be examined in perspective, given the vast expanse of Indonesia as an archipelago and the resulting difficulties in linking the entire country to the Internet. This article seeks to trace the development of the Internet in Indonesia and examine the resulting impact on the reach of the radical Bahasa Indonesia Islamic websites in the Indonesian Archipelago and beyond. It also highlights typical narrative and operations of the radical websites, which serves to distinguish them from radical websites from elsewhere, such as the Middle East.*

This article examines the development of the Internet in Indonesia as well as the trends and observations regarding its usage. The article hopes to fill the gap in the current study of radical websites by situating them in the societal context of Internet usage in Indonesia. By doing so, it becomes a simpler task to understand the manner in which ideas placed online are conceptualized, the people that may be behind these ideas, and from there, provide an educated hypothesis of possible future developments of the online radical community.

The Internet is increasingly becoming a vital medium of communication on an individual and a societal level. This has resulted in an increasingly information technology (IT)-savvy younger generation, some of whom also have the intention of committing terror. Saudi researcher Khaled al-Faram estimated that there are currently 5,600 websites that disseminate Al Qaeda-influenced ideology around the world, and that the number is increasing by 900 every year.<sup>1</sup> Noordin M Top, a Jemaah Islamiyyah (JI) leader who orchestrated several major bombings in Indonesia, was believed to have ordered the creation of a website with content on the best ways to attack foreigners in addition to the favored places to attack foreigners in Jakarta. The arrest of Abdul Basheer s/o Abdul Kader in

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Singapore is also a good example. Abdul Basheer was a former law lecturer who aspired to join *mujahidin* fighters in Afghanistan after being influenced by extremist ideas from the Internet,<sup>2</sup> thus demonstrating the potential of the Internet as a tool for propaganda and recruitment. These examples are all instances of the phenomenon of cyberterrorism. The U.S. National Conference for State Legislatures defines cyberterrorism as the usage of information technology by groups and individuals intending to commit acts of terror to further their agenda.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the current literature on radical websites focuses on Arabic language websites. Indonesian language radical websites, however, deserve a closer study given the fact that radical Islamism is becoming an increasingly salient factor in the Indonesian political arena. In the democratic transition following the fall of Suharto, radical Islamic sentiments had emerged from the shadows of repression of the authoritarian regime. The most populous Muslim nation in the world had been previously known for its moderate interpretation of the faith. However, organizations propounding Islamism are now allowed to carry their agendas into the political arena by the new era.

The emergence of Islamism as a legitimate political movement has led to a shift in the tone of Indonesian discourse. What would have been considered radical polemics are now seen as mainstream views.<sup>4</sup>

Radical websites are thus like “texts” to understand the post-Suharto era Islamist discourse. Monitoring extremist websites allows the understanding of two important points. The first is the development of the organizations responsible for managing the websites. The second is to allow researchers to understand the activities conducted by the groups or individuals and what these may mean for the organization, individual, or the society around them. In addition, monitoring websites allows readers to identify the ideology held by the groups or individuals responsible for creating them and the message they communicate to followers in order to win supporters.

However, considering the pressing need to understand the Indonesian Islamist discourse, there is almost no academic study of Indonesian language radical websites, their narrative, and impact on militants and other readers. Merlyna Lim’s work on sociopolitical conditions in Indonesia and their relationship with the Internet was the only one available in this genre. Much of the information in this article, especially in the earlier part, will thus be built on from her research.

The definition of what a radical website constitutes is taken from Kent Anderson’s three-tiered scheme for categorizing fringe activity on the Internet.<sup>5</sup> The activities are classified into “Use,” “Misuse,” and “Offensive Use.” According to this classification, “Use” refers to the normal use of Internet/World Wide Web to facilitate communications or organizations via technology. “Misuse” occurs when the line is crossed from expression of ideas to acts that compromise targeted sites. Potentially this would also mean disseminating extremist ideology in order to indoctrinate the target audience with hatred and violence against the adversary. “Offensive use” is the next level where the medium is used to train and indoctrinate, urging the target audience to wage violent *jihad*, depict the actual use of violence against the adversary, as well as using the medium to conduct attacks. The article examines websites that fall into the category of “Misuse” and “Offensive Use.”

### **Brief History of the Internet in Indonesia**

The Internet in Indonesia was first connected in 1983 in the Department of Computer Science in the University of Indonesia in Jakarta.<sup>6</sup> The university was linked to the UU Net

in the United States.<sup>7</sup> In 1994, Indonesian government bodies and ISPs obtained permanent Internet connections.<sup>8</sup> In the same year, the first commercial ISP, PT Indo Internet, was formed.<sup>9</sup> Early users of the Internet comprised non-commercial researchers and hobby groups.<sup>10</sup> This was soon to change.

Two years later, another milestone in the development of the Internet in Indonesia took place. In 1996, Indonesia's first Internet café, commonly termed *warnet*,<sup>11</sup> was established.<sup>12</sup> The quarterly newsletter of the Asia Pacific Network Information Center put the current figure of *warnet* in Indonesia at approximately 1,500.<sup>13</sup> These cybercafés are estimated to provide 60 to 70 percent of the total Internet access in Indonesia, a very considerable proportion. Merlyna Lim raised the importance of understanding the *warnets* if one wishes to understand the impact of the Internet in Indonesia.<sup>14</sup>

After 1998, companies started offering bigger Internet cafés with more sophisticated computers.<sup>15</sup> Schools as well as university-based networks began to take over the established Internet cafés,<sup>16</sup> thus the beginning of increased institutionalization of Internet usage. People presently use the Internet in offices, universities, and *pesantrens*, the Islamic schools. Amid this development, *warnets* continue to exist and are still an important aspect of the information technology scene in Indonesia, as they provide Internet access to people who are unable to afford their own computers and the subscription fee.

The work of providing Internet access to the whole of Indonesia, though, is still plagued with problems of long distances and access to populations in remote areas and mountainous terrain.<sup>17</sup> The most recent statistic on the number of Internet users in Indonesia revealed a mere 10 percent of the entire population.<sup>18</sup> A map of Indonesia shows a country that consists of more than 17,000 islands. The distance between any two islands is considerable. Even within an island, cities can be some distance apart. Therefore, providing Internet accessibility in remote and lesser-populated areas is a significant challenge in Indonesia.

The Minister of Communication and Informatics, Muhamad Nuh, set a target of 2011 as the year when Internet will become accessible to all the villages in Indonesia.<sup>19</sup> Approximately 38,000 villages across Indonesia currently need access to the Internet.<sup>20</sup> On 7 April 2008, the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism launched an Open Distance E-Learning Pesantren program with the Ford Foundation.<sup>21</sup> This program promised to provide aids, such as computers, to e-learning to eight *pesantrens* across Java.<sup>22</sup> This showed the increasing need for the Internet in the Archipelago and that international collaboration is increasingly put in place in order to bring about more sophisticated access to the Internet in institutes of learning. The challenges, however, have not prevented an astounding increase in the number of Internet users in Indonesia. The 2005 statistics taken from the Asia Pacific Network Information Center showed that the number of Internet subscribers and users in Indonesia has increased 11-fold and the number of Internet users has increased more than 31-fold since 1998.<sup>23</sup> The Head of the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association says that the number of Internet users in Indonesia is currently pegged at 25 million, which is an increase of 5 million since 2006.<sup>24</sup> While it has yet to displace the more "traditional" form of mass media in conveying information such as the television and newspapers, the exponential increase shows that, with each year, it is becoming an increasingly crucial tool for work, study, and access to information.

### **Profile of a Typical Internet User in Indonesia**

Several pertinent issues arise due to the existence of radical Islamic websites. These include the person responsible for their creation and maintenance, their viewers' profile, the intentions of these viewers, and how they plan to implement the ideas they obtained from

the websites. Understanding the general profile of Internet users in Indonesia is important before attempting to understand Bahasa Indonesia extremist websites' narrative and operations. Based on her research, Merlyna Lim sees the typical Internet user in Indonesia as a young individual, typically based in urban areas where the Internet is more likely to be easily accessible. This is especially true in the aforementioned institutions of learning and offices.<sup>25</sup>

Merlyna Lim also noted that a high percentage of Internet users tend to be male.<sup>26</sup> This corresponds with the content of the Indonesian extremist websites, which, for most part, appear to be written by men for a male audience. However, the contents of the radical websites show that there appears to be an increasing number of female users, which fits Lim's observation that there are more women who use the Internet now.<sup>27</sup> Articles—such as an article posted on a personal blog calling for women to support their husbands' involvement as *mujahidins*—attempting to persuade Muslim women to be involved in *jihad* have been observed recently.<sup>28</sup> Some radical websites, like Arrahmah Media, have dedicated a section of the website for a female audience.<sup>29</sup> Unlike Middle Eastern radical websites, the Bahasa Indonesia website postings to-date appear to still confine Muslim women to a “passive logistical role”<sup>30</sup> in supporting *jihad*. Most of the postings exhort women to play the roles of good Muslim wives and reject the values that the West is supposedly selling, such as independence and the idea of being career women.<sup>31</sup> Little is known about the women's role in terror operations but five women had been arrested for smuggling explosive materials from Malaysia into Indonesia in 2006.<sup>32</sup> The fact that women in extremist organizations were given the job of maintaining internal lines of communication and providing logistical support to terrorist operations while the men carry out the attacks reflects the supporting role that Bahasa Indonesia radical websites advocate for Muslim women. The increase in the number of articles targeted at female readers thus reflects, most possibly, a greater number of female audience for the Bahasa Indonesia extremist websites, and also the values that the radical organizations and personnel behind the articles wish to convey to the readers. The content of the articles also reflect the values that members of radical organizations convey to the female members.

### **Some Observations about Extremist Bahasa Indonesia Websites**

The following section will discuss some typical discourse of the Indonesian language radical websites. This will be followed by observations with regard to some aspects of their operations. The final section will highlight some cases of cyberterrorism in Indonesia.

### **Typical Narrative of Indonesian Language Radical Websites**

#### ***Concern with Plight of Overseas Brethren***

The radical Bahasa Indonesia websites possess their own unique characteristics. First, the extremist websites are concerned about matters outside Indonesia. They are created in response to what is perceived as injustice committed against Muslim communities in other countries, for instance the Arab–Israeli conflict in the Middle East, as well as current events in Pakistan and also in Chechnya. Anti-Jewish sentiments are strong on radical Indonesian language websites. For instance, groups such as the Indonesian Committee for the Palestinian Solidarity, also known as KISPA, were formed to support the Palestinian cause.<sup>33</sup> Websites such as the Palestinian Information Center also update readers on the current situation in the Middle East.<sup>34</sup>

However, increasingly, the content of the websites is focusing on the situation of Muslims in countries not previously noted and where perceived persecution of Muslims takes place. Examples of such areas are the Maldives and Southern Thailand. Postings that draw attention toward the perceived injustice against Muslims in other parts of the world encourage sentiments of moral outrage. These perceptions provide the basis for the post-911 *jihadi* movement and are a source of radical sentiments in general.<sup>35</sup>

To cite an example, the Arrahmah Media website posted in November 2007 reported the declaration of the Islamic State of Caucasus by the Amir of the Chechen *mujahidin*, Dokka Umarov.<sup>36</sup> The declaration was found on other extremist websites as well. This showed the widespread concern among Indonesia hard-liners about issues taking place in Chechnya. The Arrahmah Media website itself is a radical website that is believed to be managed by the Muhammed Jibril, the son of one of the important leaders of Jema'ah Islamiyah, Abu Jibril.

Around May 2008, some members of the radical forums also expressed the desire to know more about the situation in Southern Thailand. Khattab Media Publication issued an interview it conducted with a certain Sheikh Abu Ubaidah, a Malaysian who had left for Pattani to conduct *jihad*.<sup>37</sup> The interview shed light on the current situation in Thailand, claiming that Pattani has been oppressed under the Thai government, which adheres to Buddhism and is a puppet of the United States.<sup>38</sup> Thus, fighting the Thai troops is akin to fighting the United States itself.<sup>39</sup> Abu Ubaidah identified Malaysia and Indonesia as places where *jihad* is much needed; however, priority should be given to Pattani as the suffering that its Muslim community is undergoing is more intense than that in the other two countries.<sup>40</sup> He also revealed that the *mujahidins* in Pattani come from many parts of the world and that the situation there is one of an uprising by the religious community, not a nationalistic one.<sup>41</sup>

A Powerpoint file detailing the suffering of the Muslims in Southern Thailand was also found on the Arrahmah Media website around the same time. The presentation declared that it was the *fardu ain* (individual religious obligation) of Muslims in the neighboring countries to come to the aid of the persecuted in Pattani. It specifically called on the Muslims in Malaysia, as Southern Thailand's closest neighbor, to help the Pattani Muslims. Sidney Jones, the Senior Advisor of the International Crisis Group (ICG) warned the audience with regard to the impact of such messages on the radical websites. Contacts have known to have been made between radicals in Mindanao with those in Southern Thailand.<sup>42</sup> In addition, evidence of the impact of such presentation found online was seen in the arrest of two Malaysians for stealing a motorbike in June 2008.<sup>43</sup> They had confessed to having attempted to enter Southern Thailand for the purpose of aiding *jihad* after viewing the messages from the radical websites.<sup>44</sup> Research has shown that the acts of terrorism are almost always motivated by indignation at the sufferings of others, and rarely for injustice that happened to the perpetrators themselves.<sup>45</sup> According to Marc Sageman, "In the 1980s, the most significant source of these feelings was the killings of Muslims in Afghanistan. In the 1990s, it was the fighting in Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir. Then came the second Palestinian *intifadhah* beginning in 2000. And since 2003, it has been all about the war in Iraq, which has become the focal point of global moral outrage for Muslims all over the world. . . . On a more local level, governments that appear overly pro-American cause radicals to feel they are the victims of a larger anti-Muslim conspiracy, bridging the perceived local and global attacks against them."<sup>46</sup> The phrases and themes used in Bahasa Indonesia radical websites reflected the identification its members felt with the discourses used by the global Islamic grievances. Merlyna Lim, in her research of a comparative study of Indonesian and Iranian blogs, found that although the websites help to bring down global

barriers and create a new form of global narrative very quickly, a “local contextualisation of global discourses” ultimately takes place.<sup>47</sup> An example is how the extremist websites took up the issue of commemoration of the first *intifadhah* by some Middle Eastern websites. The *intifadhah* is an Arabic word that literally means to awaken and shake off. The term is used to refer to the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of their territories from 1987 to 1993, a significant milestone in the history of the Arab–Israeli relationship.

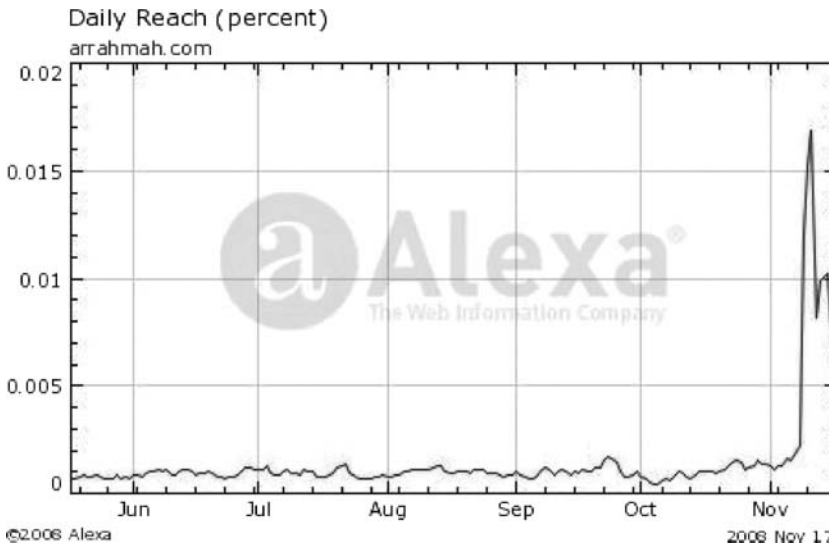
In December 2007, the Indonesian Committee for the Palestinian Solidarity (KISPA) organized two activities to commemorate the first *intifadhah*.<sup>48</sup> In addition, it stated in this solidarity campaign that the aim was to cultivate the spirit of *intifadhah* among Indonesian undergraduates. While it is not certain what was actually spoken during the event itself, the element of bringing what was originally a foreign (that is, Palestinian) concept to Indonesia could be seen from the event advertisement. The Palestinian aim of shaking off Israeli occupation was interpreted as breaking free from something else in Indonesia, possibly the shaking off of secular rule. The free borrowing of the foreign terms showed the solidarity the Indonesian online radicals feel with their overseas counterparts.

### ***Glorification of Local and Regional Martyrs***

Indonesian militants also take a keen interest in developments within Indonesia and in the region. Many radicals in Indonesia feel that they are living in a country governed by infidels. Those who have been prosecuted due to their involvement in terror invariably receive their sympathy. The most sensational example was with regard to the Bali bombers. The Bahasa Indonesia radical websites, like their “secular” counterparts, discussed the issue of their execution furiously, from the impending and the aftermath. The Arrahmah Media website dedicated a section of its webpage specifically to covering the development of the legal proceedings leading to the execution of the bombers. The traffic of the website after the execution was reportedly so high that its administrators closed it temporarily, with a statement explaining their temporary unavailability and promising a return within a short time.<sup>49</sup> Figure 1, taken from a Web information company, Alexa.com, showed the sharp rise in the number of visitors to the Arrahmah Media website following news of the execution of the Bali bombers in November 2008. The figure took on an immediate and rapid decline in the days after the execution. This showed a fall in the anticipation for more news with regard to the bombers and possibly, shift in attention toward other issues in the Muslim world.

There appears to be a fear of a prolonged disappearance of any website among the online radical community. This was observed when another website, Forum Islam Al-Tawbah, became unavailable in August 2008. Many members of the online community asked repeatedly about the fate of the website, some speculating that it had been hacked by the anti-Muslims. When it finally resurfaced in September 2008, the forum administrator made an effort to clarify its disappearance. Thus the radical websites are viewed by its members and supporters as “territories” to be defended against. Any disappearance, however temporary, will cause feelings of discomfort and loss with perceived victory of the secular faction among the online radical community. The administrators of Arrahmah Media seemed to understand this sentiment among the online *jihadi* community well, taking care to explain the reason for their departure and promising a swift restoration of the website. True to its promise, the website was operating normally again a week after its closure.

The escape of Mas Selamat bin Kastari from Singapore in February 2008 similarly met with many responses among the online *jihadi* community. There were many online expressions of jubilation at the dramatically successful escape of the detainee. For instance



**Figure 1.** Daily Percentage of Users for Arrahmah Media Website (June–November 2008)

the Abu Bakr blog said, “Thanks be to Allah, thanks be given to his presence that our brother Mas Selamat Kastari has done great glory in disengaging himself from the clutches of the Singapore police the previous evening. The country that often puffs its chest with its advanced technology and tight security was finally defeated by the allegedly lame leader of the Singapore branch of Jemaah Islamiyah. This is good news for all lovers of jihad and let us all pray that he will be saved from the hunting dogs of the Singapore government and will be able to escape to Indonesia or Malaysia.”<sup>50</sup> One member of the Arrahmah Media website even called on readers to consider the situation of *jihad* in Indonesia. However, interest in such “news feed” is fickle, as is the attention paid to any news from the secular media. Postings related to the escape of Mas Selamat bin Kastari reduced as the days go by and stopped altogether a month later, with one more posting in May that attempted to, unsuccessfully, revive interest in *jihad* in Singapore.<sup>51</sup>

## Operations

### *Symbiotic Relationship between Websites*

Hanna Rogan described radical websites as operating relatively independent of one another but “many sites are inter-related in the sense that they frequently redistribute and circulate the same material.”<sup>52</sup> There is an observed link between different extremist websites propounding similar beliefs. This is presumably done to achieve some form of ideological affinity with other websites, both local and foreign. Similar files or videos are often found on different websites. Some members of the websites, for instance, share information on how to conduct hacking via online forums. Multiple memberships in different online forums are also common. For the case of Indonesia, observations of two websites, Al Muhajirun and Al Ghuroba, highlight the example of links between extremist websites.

Al Muhajirun is the name of a disbanded terrorist group from the United Kingdom. Al Ghuroba represents Al Muhajirun’s offshoot group after it was disbanded. Al Ghuroba

was later also banned by the U.K. government in 2006 but continued to operate under the new name of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah,<sup>53</sup> basically through a password-protected forum manned by the former spokesman of Al Muhajirun and subsequently Al Ghuroba, Anjem Choudary.<sup>54</sup> The forum can only be accessed via an introduction by existing members. It reportedly consists of recordings of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, as well as the founder of the Al Muhajirun sect, Omar Bakri Mohammed. Al Muhajirun in Indonesia appeared to be an organization where activities were largely conducted online as well. It is not certain, however, if the Indonesian Al Muhajirun website is linked to the U.K. branch, especially since the U.K. group had been disbanded by its founder in 2004. According to Sidney Jones, the Indonesian Al Muhajirun appeared to be a wholly owned subsidiary of the JI.<sup>55</sup> The organization's magazine, the *Jihadmagz*, has a similar layout and utilized the same publisher as JI.<sup>56</sup> The organization was based in Jakarta-Krawang and Banten area in West Java.<sup>57</sup> Its leader is a man named Abu Yahya, a graduate of the Organization for Islamic and Arabic Knowledge (LIPIA).<sup>58</sup> The Al Ghuroba cell in Indonesia, on the other hand, was noted to have been introduced by students who had been to Karachi, Pakistan and were members of that cell. The students were namely Gun Gun Rusmawan and Abdul Rohim.

The Internet allows the playing out of the fantasies of its users and this is the case with the extremist websites as well. For instance, the Al Ghuroba blog owner listed his location as Qandahar, Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier, the employment of terms and names by members of the radical websites reveal their affinity with the development around the world. Placing oneself as being in a different country is common in forums and blogs, even among non-radical Islamic websites. With regard to the Al Ghuroba blog, the language used in the blog is, without a doubt, Bahasa Indonesia and the blogger's familiarity with the updated situation in Indonesia cannot be matched by someone who lives outside the Archipelago.

Nevertheless, there does appear to be a very close linkage between the Indonesian Al Muhajirun website and the Al Ghuroba website and this relationship appears to mirror the relationship of the two actual organizations, one of which is the offshoot of the other. Postings found on the Al Muhajirun website are often featured on the Al Ghuroba website as well. In addition, Al Ghuroba often helps Al Muhajirun advertise its activities. For instance, in December 2007, Al Ghuroba featured the special edition of Al Muhajirun's magazine, encouraging its readers to buy them.<sup>59</sup> Both are open websites that can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection. Unlike its alleged U.K. counterpart, the Indonesian Al Ghuroba website is a blog hosted by Blogspot. Even so, their close relationship seems too much of a coincidence to be dismissed and is therefore an example of close linkages between websites that result in the sharing of information between extremist websites.

Yet another example of sharing and links between the websites was the uploaded file of the Bali bombers, currently awaiting execution, on the Al Firdaus website.<sup>60</sup> The same letter written by Amrozi, Mukhlas, and Imam Samudera could also be found in the Al Ghuroba website.<sup>61</sup> By sharing files such as these written by convicted terror perpetrators essentially negates the geographical and spatial boundaries, as readers from other parts of the world are able to access, read, and possibly become influenced by the radical statements.

### ***Medium of Propaganda***

All extremist websites provide an alternative form of media to established secular news outlets and other forms of mass media. Indonesian language extremist websites are no different. The mass media is deemed to have been influenced by Western propaganda, thus many of the radical websites have stated that their mission was to correct the impact of

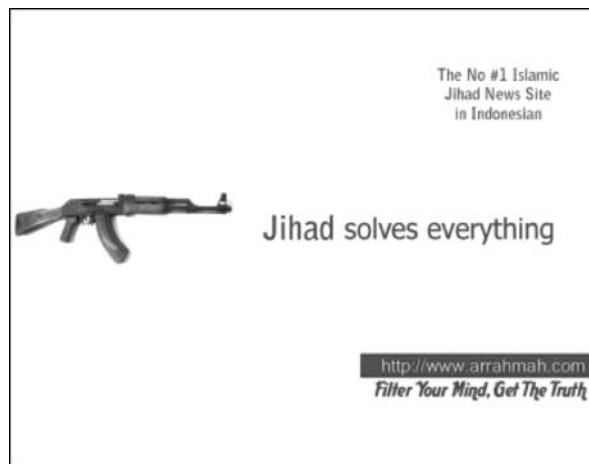




**Figure 2.** Computer Wallpaper: AK-47s (Source: Arrahmah Media website, <http://www.annahmah.com>)

the propaganda by putting forth perspectives from the Muslim world. Many postings on the Bahasa Indonesia radical websites, for instance, consist of “news feeds” on the current issues pertaining to the Muslim world. Most of the “news feeds” will be edited to take on the radical’s perspective on the issue.

Bahasa Indonesia extremist websites are still mainly utilized as a means of propaganda dissemination. The websites commonly utilize images, computer wallpapers, videos, and persuasive rhetoric to convey the sufferings of fellow Muslims around the world. More importantly, the websites also suggest to their readers the preferred solution to the problem. Figures 2 and 3 are computer wallpapers created by Arrahmah Media, the website managed by Abu Jibril’s son. They are made available for downloading by readers. The pictures contain images of the AK 47 machine guns used by the *mujahidins* in Afghanistan.



**Figure 3.** Computer Wallpaper: *Jihad Solves Everything* (Source: Arrahmah Media website, <http://www.annahmah.com>)

Another computer wallpaper bears a simple but powerful statement: "Jihad solves everything."

Marc Sageman observed that "the mass nature of the Internet communication encourages sound bites and other reductionist answers to difficult questions. Drawn to their logical conclusion, these views encourage extreme, abstract, but simplistic solutions, without regard to the reality and complexity of life."<sup>62</sup> Radical websites are no different from "normal" websites in this respect. Portrayals of violence in pictorial form like the above encourage just such simplistic solutions to the problems of the Muslim world.

Other means of propaganda are in the written content of the websites. Much of the content of the Bahasa Indonesia websites, like the radical websites elsewhere, thrives on conspiracy theories or simply negative portrayals of the West and other perceived enemies. The example of a post on the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)'s website in November 2007 highlights this. The Hizbut Tahrir published a long list of political developments around the world and in Indonesia that took place in the months of September and October 2007.<sup>63</sup> On each news item, Hizbut Tahrir added its own comments. The translation of the news item and the comment added by HTI goes as follows: "The FBI has opened up vacancies for agents in the areas of linguistics and is looking for special agents from the Muslim community including those who are fluent in Bahasa Indonesia" (Jawa Pos, 3/9). The HTI commented: "This is an implementation of Bush's strategy as outlined in his speech on March 2006 of using Muslim community to fight Muslims. They are not happy to see the nation with majority Muslims of Indonesia becoming strong."

The readers of the HTI website who posted their comments on the news expressed shock and anger at the United States. One reader wrote: "The religious community will become more intelligent if they are diligent in reading the political information with the angle of Islam!"<sup>64</sup> Thus, it can be seen that some of the readers may be swayed by the arguments put forth by the extremist websites. However, this is certainly just one example. Not all online propaganda elicits similarly sympathetic responses. For instance, the Bali bombers' statement of purpose on the Al Firdaus website did not manage to attract much attention as compared to other postings on *jihad*, as seen from the number of views it had in comparison to the others.

### ***Medium of Publicity***

In addition, websites also make for a good form of medium to advertise, especially for activities conducted by the organizations themselves. For instance, the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia regularly posts advertisements calling for participants for the activities it conducts online. Last year's International Caliphate Conference was widely publicized by its official website.<sup>65</sup> However, the reach of websites alone to achieve participation is limited in a country like Indonesia. As mentioned in the previous section, Internet users only amount to 10 percent of the Indonesian population. Thus, there is a need to couple advertisement with more "traditional" forms of media such as newspapers, radio, and television to reach a greater audience. For instance, the HTI organized parades in various cities in Indonesia simultaneously. These parades are a good form of advertisement for people who may not have access to technology such as the Internet to find out about the Caliphate conference. Some websites such as the Al Muhajirun website also utilize the virtual space to advertise for its magazine.<sup>66</sup> As mentioned previously, the special edition of the Al Muhajirun magazine was advertised on other websites as well.

Members of radical organizations also utilize websites in order to disseminate messages. As the days neared for the execution of the Bali bombers, a website

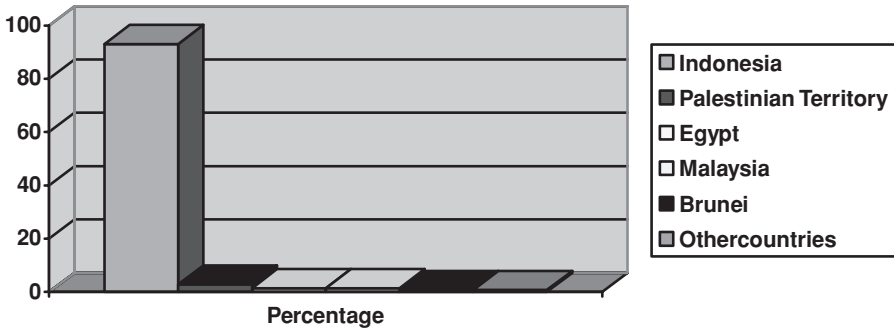


Figure 4. Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia website readers.

(www.fozwarabbilkakbah.com) appeared on 5 August 2008, containing a threat to assassinate the Indonesian president and some government officials if the execution was carried out.<sup>67</sup> The content of the website was viewed as a serious threat by the Indonesian authorities and efforts were made to hunt down its creator. However, the website disappeared after the execution of the bombers.<sup>68</sup> The development showed the nature of the website: its ease of creation and closing down when the situation deemed it necessary, making the tracking down of its creators difficult. It also highlighted the case whereby a website is used as a medium of publicity, communicating a specific demand onto an intended audience.

**Audience**

Another question raised in the course of looking at the extremist websites is the identity and places of origin of its audience. A search online found the following statistics. Figure 4 shows that readers from Indonesia make up the bulk of the readers of the Hizbut Tahrir website, making up 93 percent of its audience.

The statistics proved that a majority of the audience of the hard-line Bahasa Indonesia websites comes from within Indonesia. The other countries noted in Figure 4 share a common trait: The audience in these countries understand Bahasa Indonesia. It is thus possible that the factor of a similar language contributed to the second highest number of readers but this is not consistent. It is highly possible that language contributes to the

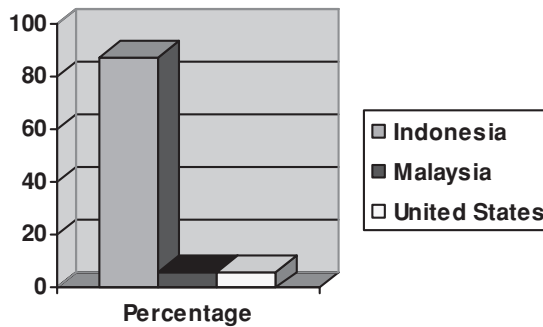


Figure 5. Al Muhajirun website readers.

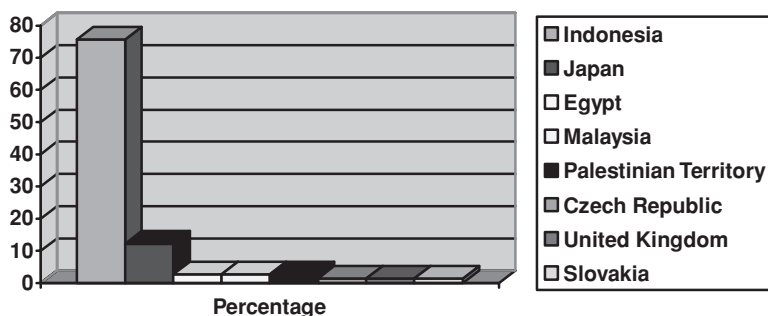


Figure 6. Palestinian Information Center website readers.

phenomenon as Bahasa Indonesia is a language that is not as widely understood outside of the region as, say, Arabic.

The reach of these websites is predominantly international. However, it is difficult to quantify the statistics. For instance, visitors from the Czech Republic and Japan are among the readers of the websites. It is unclear if the visitors have a genuine interest in reading Bahasa Indonesia extremist websites, or if they are simply random visitors. However, one thing for certain is the presence of a significant number of people reading the websites in other parts of the world. Thus, the danger of radicalization is not confined to Indonesia or the countries within the Southeast Asian region but rather far beyond the region to relatively distant areas such as Europe.

However, it is also important not to exaggerate the impact of the online extremist message in Indonesia. As mentioned, the number of Internet users in Indonesia may be growing but it is still very low to date. This “implies the difficulty of jihadism online to reach the masses” in the country.<sup>69</sup>

### *Sources of Funding*

It is also imperative to examine the sources of funding of the Indonesian language radical websites. As Hanna Rogan observed, overt calls for financial support by the extremist websites are not common<sup>70</sup> and this is the case for Bahasa Indonesia websites as well. However, the content of some websites provides readers with a good guess as to the sources of funding either for the websites themselves, or the organizations behind them. Most websites act as venues of advertisement for products that the organizations behind them offered. The profit from their sale is then used in turn to fund the maintenance of the websites.

For instance, there is an advertisement by an Australian server company on the Al Firdaus website. At some point in time, the website featured an advertisement by a humanitarian organization called Direct Relief and it invited the criticism of one member of the forum because it called for aid for the victims of Hurricane Katrina in the United States.<sup>71</sup> The phenomenon shows that these companies may be unwittingly supporting extremist websites and these companies come from the very countries that are in the forefront of the fight against terror. This concurs with the findings of The Middle East Media Research Institute’s (MEMRI) Inquiry and Analysis Series about militant websites being “hosted directly or through subervers by Western Internet Service Providers (ISPs).”<sup>72</sup> Although the findings were based on research on Arabic language *jihadist* websites, it appeared to

apply to Indonesian language radical websites as well. MEMRI noted, though, that the ISPs were usually unaware of the content of the websites they were hosting due to the language barrier.<sup>73</sup> The results of the study as well as the observations in this article highlight the need for greater awareness of the content of the websites hosted by ISPs.

Another way of sourcing for funding is through direct calls for donation; however, this is not common on Bahasa Indonesia radical websites. Although Rogan stated that bank account numbers are not usually posted on the extremist websites, KISPA has done so for the purpose of urging readers to donate to the Palestinian cause as part of their *infaq* (tithe) obligation.<sup>74</sup>

A more common venture, especially among the websites that are manned by radical organizations, is to sell items online. Part of the funds from the sale, presumably, contributes toward the maintenance of the websites. For example, the Palestinian Information Center website sold writing books printed with the photographs of Palestinian martyrs Syaikh Ahmed Yassin, Abdul Aziz Rantisi, and Yahya Ayyasy on its cover.<sup>75</sup> Costing Rp. 2000 a book, the website stated that it would direct 10 percent of its proceeds to the Palestinian cause.<sup>76</sup> The sale of merchandise such as the notebook is one of the sources of financial supply for the organization. By featuring martyrs on the cover of the notebook, the Palestinian Information Center was also drawing the attention of Muslims all over the world—particularly those who can be reached through an Indonesian language website—to the struggle for the return of the Palestinian state. The Palestinian Information Center also raises funds by selling books. In December 2007, it advertised the sale of a book entitled *Independent Palestine or Third Intifadhah*.<sup>77</sup>

Another instance of a radical website that sells products online to secure funding for its activities is the Arrahmah Media website. The Jakarta-based Arrahmah company, according to International Crisis Group, “pioneered the commercial sale and marketing of VCDs from Al Qaeda and other jihadist websites.”<sup>78</sup> The company began to sell books in 2007 as well, with *Tiada Khilafah Tanpa Tauhid wal Jihad* (There can be no Caliphate without Tauhid and Jihad) representing its maiden publication.<sup>79</sup> In March 2008, the company launched its first magazine, *Jihad Magz*, at the Jakarta Islamic Book Fair.<sup>80</sup> The two examples show that many of the radical websites that are a front for organizations are funded through the sale of the organizations’ products, rather than from direct donation. A few are also (unwittingly?) funded by the very target they are against: Western countries that are involved in the fight against extremism.

## Cyberterrorism

The U.S. National Conference for State Legislatures (NCSL) defined “cyberterrorism” as “The use of information technology by terrorist groups and individuals to further their agenda. This can include use of information technology to organize and execute attacks against networks, computer systems and telecommunications infrastructures, or for exchanging information or making threats electronically.”<sup>81</sup> The Indonesian police had discovered websites with bomb manuals and instructions on attacking foreigners in Indonesia, created under the instruction of terror convicts. However, the early part of 2008 saw the shift of the Indonesian language radical websites, in particular the password-protected websites, from merely disseminating extremist ideas, to passing on violent materials. This signified a shift in development of Indonesian language radical websites from “Misuse” to “Offensive use” according to Anderson’s theory.

### ***Bomb Manuals***

The Bahasa Indonesia websites are still in the stage of propounding ideological radicalism rather than being a medium of instruction for carrying out violence. Unlike the Arabic language radical websites, *jihadist* training manuals do not flourish on the Bahasa Indonesia websites at this stage. However, bomb manuals found on the radical websites appear to be moving toward sophistication in content. In early 2008, detailed bomb and firearms manuals were found on Al Muhajirun, Arrahmah Media, and Forum Islam Al-Tawbah websites. All were apparently posted by the same person, with multiple memberships in the different forums. The justification for using weapons was provided, saying that Prophet Muhammad had replied, “Arrow” (*aromyu*) when asked what “strength” (*alquwwah*) meant to him.<sup>82</sup> Thereby, the person who posted the manuals told forum readers that, in the modern context, this would refer to the usage of rocket and bombs.<sup>83</sup> Members of the forums had shown enthusiasm in downloading the websites and, possibly, even putting the contents of the manuals into practice. In fact, the posting of the bomb manuals appeared to have sparked off a series of discussions about the usage of weapons in defending oppressed Muslims around the world.<sup>84</sup> The manuals themselves were more comprehensive than the ones previously found on Imam Samudra’s website, with detailed explanation on how to assemble different types as well as different components of bombs. Explanations, however, were patchy in some areas, such as with regard to the storage, assembly, and deployment of the resulting chemicals and bombs. Safety instructions, for instance, were lacking in the case of the making of nitroglycerin. Even though nitroglycerin is a very unstable explosive, there is no instruction on safety measures. There is also no instruction on how to store the resulting nitroglycerin. The lack of safety instructions certainly poses grave danger to readers who attempt to produce the chemicals and bombs and reflects a lack of technical expertise on the part of the writer.

However, the creation of the manuals and the amount of interest they generate in the websites show that some Bahasa Indonesia radical websites are moving in the direction of their Middle East counterparts, with more content that aims to help readers carry out violence in real life. A posting by a member of the Forum Islam Al-Tawbah in December 2008 stated that he had given the bomb manuals more than a thought; he had attempted making them and shared a better way of making nitroglycerin and nitrocellulose than the manuals indicated.<sup>85</sup> In addition, he posted his own recipe of making cyclonite and mercury fulminate. Some of the readers who replied to the forum thread asked him for more tips on creating the chemicals for bombmaking, showing that interest in putting the manuals into practice went beyond one individual. The fact that the manuals were placed on password-protected websites also helped, as privacy allows for more open discussion. In addition, other materials of a more “violent” nature were also found on Indonesian language websites. Examples of such materials are war manuals and hacking manuals, which will be discussed in subsequent sections of the article.

### ***War Manuals***

The creation of a new password-protected radical website based in Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, the Forum Islam Al Tawbah, heralded the introduction of war manuals on Indonesian language radical websites. The forum dedicates a section entirely to discussions on military skills and tactics. The section included videos on self-defense,<sup>86</sup> a topographical map of Jakarta and Indonesia as a whole,<sup>87</sup> links to websites teaching military skills,<sup>88</sup> Sun Tzu’s Art of War philosophy,<sup>89</sup> video of sniper training and how to camouflage and target,<sup>90</sup>

and discussion on weapons used by *mujahidins*.<sup>91</sup> The links and videos provided began as rudimentary discussion with materials shared being those found on open websites such as YouTube and Wikipedia. However, the discussion, with specific interests in military skills and tactics and the effort to exchange information about that online, signified a significant shift from mere ideological interest to an operational focus. Complete learning of military skills online may still be far from possible; however, the discussions among members showed that the interest to learn these skills is very much alive.

### ***Hacking Manuals***

Prior to the progression to highly violent materials such as bombmaking manuals, one Bahasa Indonesia extremist website had been filled with detailed instructions on cyberterrorism such as hacking. The founder and managing director of the security company Encurve, LLC, Kent Anderson, noted that, unlike normal forms of hacking, politically motivated hacking such as the Internet *jihād* that online radicals profess to do, are selective in terms of their targets.<sup>92</sup> In addition, “the attack is designed to effect a change in the behaviour or activity of the victim.”<sup>93</sup>

With the aforementioned purpose, the Forum Jihad Al Firdaus website dedicates an entire section to the purpose of *jihād* through the Internet. Some members of the Al Firdaus forum actively share their IT knowledge about hacking and defacing websites that they deem to be detrimental to Islam.<sup>94</sup> They even share knowledge about how to go about searching for possible websites to learn how to hack into google.com without being detected by the administrators.<sup>95</sup> Hacking appears to be the “worst” form of violence that most of the Bahasa Indonesia websites featured prior to the discovery of the bomb manuals. In the case of Al Firdaus website, the administrator specifically stated that the hacking is to be done as part of *jihād* using the Internet. They had also dedicated an entire section of the forum for the purpose of sharing information and knowledge on hacking.<sup>96</sup> However, there are websites that have been proven to be linked to terror convicts in carrying out their aims. Examples include anshar.net, which is believed to be created under the orders of Noordin M Top.<sup>97</sup> However, to date, cyberterrorism, particularly attacks to debilitate the information system, has not been the main objective of most—if not all—other Bahasa Indonesia extremist websites. Any form of attack would have been counterproductive to the radical community’s own objective of using the Internet as a medium of information sharing as well as publicity. Therefore, Forum Jihad Al Firdaus is thus far the only Bahasa Indonesia radical website that encourages the practice of hacking as performing *jihād*. Its operation has by and large ceased since early 2008, showing the incompatibility between hacking and using the Internet as a medium of furthering the radicals’ cause.

### ***Cyberterrorism: Exhortation and True Cases***

The Indonesian police, for now, largely focus on violent websites such as anshar.net and less so on many other websites that may not post violent manuals but may have the potential to radicalize their readers. The case of Imam Samudera, one of the Bali bomb planners currently awaiting his death sentence, showed the increasing possibility of cyberterrorism in Indonesia. After his arrest, Samudera published an autobiography of his life and motivation for the Bali bombing from his prison cell.<sup>98</sup> His autobiography also included a section on computer hacking.<sup>99</sup> Samudera encouraged fellow Muslim radicals to attack U.S. computers and raise funds for global *jihād* by committing credit card fraud, or “carding.”<sup>100</sup> Samudera also arranged for a laptop to be smuggled into his prison cell so that he could,

it was alleged, chat with accomplices who helped to pull off the second Bali bombing.<sup>101</sup> The case of Imam Samudera highlights the increasing possibility of using information technology in any sort of operations in the world and, unfortunately, this includes terrorist operations. Samudera's case also highlighted Anderson's observation that the mere conduct of a cyberattack is insufficient for the purpose of accomplishing the goal of the perpetrator and thus extensive public relation campaigns are often necessary to accompany politically motivated cybercrime.<sup>102</sup>

In a separate example to highlight the fact that a public relations campaign needs to be put in line with cybercrime committed by the online militant community, the official website of the Ministry of Communication and Information was successfully hacked in October 2008 after the Minister, Mohammad Nuh, exhorted the Indonesian public not to treat the Bali bombers as martyrs.<sup>103</sup> In place of the webpage, a statement from the Bali bombers entitled: "Message from International Mojahideen: We'll Never be Silent . . . !!" was posted. In addition, the message called on the people to conduct assassination of those responsible for the execution of the bombers such as the Indonesian president and vice president as well as the judges responsible for the verdict. The Indonesian police had traced the hacking to a certain website: [www.fozwarabbilkakbah.com](http://www.fozwarabbilkakbah.com). However, it disappeared immediately following the execution of the Bali bombers<sup>104</sup> and subsequent investigations bore no fruit. The incident represented the only proven successful case of hacking conducted as a form of "electronic *jihād*," debilitating the necessary infrastructure of the *jihādists'* perceived enemies. It showed that although hacking is not widely practiced due to its potential detrimental effects on the *jihād*ist cause, there had been cases of politically motivated hacking and that these had been accompanied with public relations campaigns of varying degrees.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article examines the history and some trends of Internet usage in Indonesia and attempts to situate the study of radical websites within this. Common narratives in the Indonesian extremist websites, as well as their operations were highlighted. To date, most of the Indonesian hard-line websites act more as a medium for propaganda on extremist ideologies. However, a more violent stance in the websites was observed in the beginning of 2008 with the posting of the bomb manuals on password-protected websites, a new development in itself. The Indonesian government also noted seriously the threat against its government officials by a website prior to the Bali bombers' execution. Even so, many of its participants are likely to be more concerned with practical concerns rather than the desire to engage in acts of terrorism, given the current socioeconomic conditions. Thus, they may express extremist-tinged statements online but may be disinclined to actively participate in *jihād* in real life. The tough crackdown on terrorist organizations by the Indonesian police also makes it much more difficult for them to operate. Therefore, hard-line proclamations and agreement with these ideas online and even the provision of materials to commit violence need not necessarily translate into action. In addition, the "tipping point" toward radicalization differs between individuals; thus, the Internet is not the only medium with the potential to radicalize readers. Furthermore, considering the challenges in linking up the entire Archipelago to the Internet, the percentage of overall Internet users in Indonesia is still far too small for ideas placed online to be of much impact in influencing the general population. However, the content of the radical websites does provide readers with a good idea of the Islamist perspective and agenda in the post-Suharto democracy.



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 Arrahmah Media (<http://www.arahmah.com>)  
 Forum Jihad Al Firdaus (<http://www.alfirdaus.org/>)  
 Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (<http://www.hizbut-tahrir.or.id/>)  
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96. See the section "Hacking dan Jihad Elektronik" at <http://www.alfirdaus.org/>

97. <http://www.anshar.net> was created by a student of Semarang University, Moh. Agung Prabowo alias Kalingga alias Max Fiderman alias Ahmad alias Kalingga alias Bebek-bebekan in 2005. The creation of the website is suspected to be under the direction of Noordin M Top through Abdul Aziz alias Ja'far alias Qital, a suspected leader of the East Java *wakalah* of Jema'ah Islamiyah. The website contained information on foreigners' favorite places in Jakarta, information on escape routes for potential attackers as well as instruction on making bombs. It also once carried the will of Mukhlas, one of the Bali bomb convicts who are currently awaiting execution. The website has been shut down by authorities.

98. Imam Samudera's book is entitled *Aku Melawan Teroris (I Versus Terrorists)* (Solo: Jazera, 2004). It is readily available in major bookstores in Indonesia. An effort to counter Samudera's justifications for the bombings had been conducted by Ustadz Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan in his book, *Unlicensed to Kill: Countering Imam Samudera's Justification for the Bali Bombing* (Singapore: Peace Matters, 2006).

99. Alan Sipress, "An Indonesian's Prison Memoir Takes Holy War into Cyberspace," *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 14 December 2004. Available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A62095-2004Dec13.html> (accessed 18 January 2008).

100. Ibid.

101. Robert Raffaele, "Indonesian Police Charge Two Suspects with Cyber-Terrorism," *Global security.org*, 23 August 2006. Available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/news/2006/08/sec-06823-voa01.htm> (accessed 9 January 2008).

102. Anderson, "Hactivism and Politically Motivated Computer Crime."

103. "The Website of the Ministry of Communication and Information was Successfully Hacked after Minister of Communication and Information Called on the People to not Call Amrozi and Company Martyrs," *Infojihad*, 27 October 2008.

104. "Amrozi cs Dieksekusi, Situs Terror Hilang," *Tempo Interaktif*, 10 November 2008.

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