

Media and the War on Terror: A Case Study of Islamic News Magazine Reporting in the Transition Indonesia

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Abstract

This research looks at the representation of recent terrorist attacks in Indonesian Islamic news media within a context of cultural and social transition. It is based on an understanding that modern terrorism is formed in relation to the media and global networked media systems. Terrorism can be considered to be a stage upon which political 'drama' is performed for specific audiences, (national or international publics, particular groups or individuals, or political elites). In this context, the news media play a crucial role in distributing the message to the audience. At the same time, the way the news media represent the issue is influenced by the cultural, political, economic and social conditions in which the political violence is being played out.

Key words: News media, terrorism, politic

Introduction

Mass Media has been described by Campbell as "the cultural industries-the channels of communication-that produce and distribute songs, novels, newspapers, movies, internet services, and other cultural products to large numbers of people" (2003, p.6). Based on this definition, mass media can be seen as a conduit through which information about culture is transmitted to potentially sizable audiences. Mass media, news media in particular, work through the dissemination of messages to public. In countries where democratic values are upheld and people have the right to seek, own, and disseminate information, the responsibility to inform public has made the press to freely inform news without afraid of being banned by the government. This condition, added with the fact that mass media as economic institutions, have made the strong relationship between mass media and terrorism. Terrorist groups have taken this advantage to bring their acts of terror to a higher

level by emerging threats and terror toward government via the help of news media (Prayudi, 2008b).

The representation of terrorism, in particular, within the Indonesian news media are very much influenced by the rise of civil society in which citizens are given the opportunity to express their interests, needs and ideas, and hence achieve mutual goals in order to consolidate a sense of collective destiny and the formation of a truly 'civil' society. The condition has created opportunities for the emergence of new political parties and social groups like Muslim political and community organisations. It has also driven the new idea of freedom of the press in Indonesia. Through the *Reformasi* (reformation) and the emergence of new civil processes, the media has emerged as a principal agent for social criticism and the progress of the reform agenda. In this context, government policies around news and reporting underwent significant changes. Under

the New Order authoritarian press system, the government and the military controlled media and editorial policies. However, post New Order conditions. Meanwhile, and in a more libertarian press system under the *Reformasi*, the owners and professional editors became free to determine their own policies in accordance with a democratically formed regulatory regime. Government communication policy only regulates the press in order to ensure they obey codes of ethics and law.

This research analyses the representation of issue of terrorism in *Sabili*, a leading Islamic news magazine in Indonesia. *Sabili* is shaped by its own distinctive editorial, cultural and market base. With very strong connections to Islamic clergy and a faith-driven audience, *Sabili* generates a very different ideological and ethical-cultural perspective to mainstream national news media—particularly in terms of religious issues and Islamic based terrorism. The analytical framework used in this study places news representation firmly within the political context of the reform era and seeks to interrogate how this may have affected the editorial policy of the *Sabili* magazine and its reporting. Principally, this research is the continuation of the research that I conducted in 2007. While the research in 2007 was conducted using content analysis method, this current research was conducted using textual analysis with Cultural Studies approach.

This paper comprises two sections. The first section outlines the profile and editorial policy of *Sabili* news magazine. A detailed discussion of the historical background of the *Sabili* media institution is pertinent because of its potential to affect *Sabili*'s current editorial policy in representing news on terrorism. The second section outlines how the meanings of terrorism have been constructed in *Sabili* and represented to the public as news.

***Sabili*: the profile and editorial policy**

The profile

Sabili is an Islamic-oriented bi-weekly news magazine that offers its readers news that represents all aspects of Islamic life 'properly and

fairly' (*Sabili* Company Profile, 2006). The publication of this news magazine was precipitated by the Tanjung Priok massacre. On 12 September 1984 the Indonesian military opened fire on a large group of Muslims protesting the imprisonment of their Kyai (Islamic leader) and 3 of his disciples, detained for objecting to the idea of the *Pancasila* as the sole guidance of Indonesian government. At this time, many Islamic organisations were under the strict control of the government and military. Events at which many Muslims would be present had to be reported to the police and military and the content of the events was restricted to issues of how to be a devoted Muslim; Islamic political discussions were strictly prohibited. These conditions triggered some Islamic youths to conduct new ways of *dakwah* (missionary work) to represent the correct understanding of Islam. One avenue through which the dissemination of such *dakwah* was achieved was the news media. The most prominent publication, which was later named *Sabili* (the Path), was published approximately one year after the Tanjung Priok tragedy.

According to Abul Fida, the first editor-in-chief of *Sabili*, there were four philosophical precepts which underpinned the naming of *Sabili*. First, *Sabili* represented the simultaneous *dakwah* (missionaries) movement. Secondly, the movement was directed to *Allah* (Muslim God). Thirdly, *da'i* (Islamic leaders) must have *hujjah*, strong arguments with clear concepts, in the *dakwah* (missionaries) movement. Fourth, *Sabili* must be the leader in the process of *dakwah* (*Sabili* Company Profile, 2006).

Nonetheless, due to lack of funds and unprofessional news media management, *Sabili* had to stop its publication for nearly two years. It was not until 1988 that this news magazine was relaunched with better management and funds. At the end of 1992, it received a written warning from the government due to the publishing of a letter from one of its readers which was classified as having the potential to trigger a conflict with *SARA* (*Suku*, *Agama*, *Ras* and *Antar*—*golongan* or Ethnic, Religion, Race and Inter—group). The calling of its editor-in-chief

to *Kejaksaan Tinggi* (the office of the counsel for prosecution), which was a way for the government to place the editor-in-chief behind bars, ended in the temporary closing of this Islamic news magazine.

In its first editorial meeting in mid 1998, soon after the fall of the New Order and the emergence of many new news media, *Sabili* reformulated its position, vision and mission. It positioned itself as a publication concerned with the development of Islam and Muslims and sought to attract a wide readership. Under the banner of 'media for all' *Sabili* aimed not to differentiate between the political as well as religious orientations of its readers. Its vision was to become an 'information controlling and Islamic society advocating media' (*Sabili* Company Profile, 2006).

Sabili's vision is to show that Islam is a religion that inspires social consciousness and is relevant to people's aspirations of openness, pluralism and democracy. Nevertheless, the aspiration to view events from an Islamic perspective is the main foundation of its journalism practices. Its news reporting is strongly informed by the principle that it must become a facilitator for the unity of Islamic community through *islah* (harmony), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *tasamuh* and *rahmah* (useful). At the same time, *Sabili* is strictly against anything that is clearly wrong and misleading. 'Critical, sharp and smart' has become the motto for its news writing (*Sabili* Company Profile, 2006).

According to the readership survey conducted by AC Nielsen during the period 2002-2003, *Sabili* occupied the third position with 476 thousand readers, ahead of *Tempo* which was at the tenth position with 264 thousand readers. Meanwhile, the educational background of its readers shows that it is dominated by readers with a university education background (34%), followed by senior high school (30%) and junior high school (25%). As the most populous Islamic country in the world, news magazines with an Islamic perspective such as *Sabili* have great potential to continue to grow in Indonesia.

Editorial policy

In comparison to other mainstream news media such as The Jakarta Post, Kompas and Tempo news magazine, the editorial policy of Sabili is deeply rooted in religious faith. As a news magazine with an Islamic perspective, Sabili clearly places itself as news media that defends the interests of Islam and Muslims. Sabili's reporting of news is 'global', at least in as much as its interests go beyond the Indonesian state to a broader Islamic world view and world issues. As long as the news story concerns Muslims, as in the case of Muslims in Palestine, Sabili will report the news in the interests of Islam and in order to defend Muslims. In this sense, Sabili is strongly influenced by Wahabbism and a sense in which 'Jihad' or 'Islamic struggle' crosses the borders of nation states. While not advocating violence specifically, Sabili supports the notion of an Islamic struggle against the forces that would oppress Muslims.

Thus, in reporting on terrorist events associated with Islam, Sabili took a clear position to defend Islam and to show that Islam is not synonymous with terrorism or a religion teaching violence. This position was evident in the choice of news sources and the way the news magazine reported terrorist events in Indonesia. Sabili also stressed that it did not in any way endorse terrorist activities; rather, its reporting was merely concerned with clarifying the fact that Islamic terrorists had misunderstood the teachings of Islam. In doing so, Sabili employed a professional journalistic standard. In this sense, Sabili became a key player in what Jeff Lewis (2005) calls 'language wars'—those mediated and rhetorical disputes over the meaning of terrorism and political violence and the ways in which Islam, specifically, was being represented and publicly discussed.

In reporting on radical groups that had adopted Islamic values to justify their acts of violence, Sabili tended to explore the arguments behind the radicalism. Consequently, in its reporting of issues of

terrorism, *Sabili* included interviews with Islamic scholars in order to explain why Islam was not synonymous with radicalism or violence. From *Sabili*'s perspective, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. there had been a systematic attempt to present Islam as a dangerous and violent religion. Therefore, as a medium for Islamic advocacy, *Sabili* felt it was its obligation to defend Islam and address this misrepresentation. Thus, *Sabili* did not defend the Islamic radical groups themselves; rather, it attempted to explain how these groups had misunderstood Islamic teachings. However, the clear editorial position of *Sabili* did not affect its commitment to reporting the facts. As the editor-in-chief of *Sabili* stated—

Kebenaran dalam berita sangatlah penting. Kita harus memunculkan fakta daripada opini. Sabili akan dengan tegas memberitakan sebuah peristiwa jika faktanya benar, terlepas dari resiko majalah akan ditutup. Sebagai sebuah majalah dengan perspektif Islam yang berkomitmen pada kebenaran, penulisan berita Sabili didasarkan pada etika Islam dan juga kode etik jurnalistik (Sabili Interview, 2006)

[Truth in news is very important. To do so, we must present facts rather than opinion. Sabili will undoubtedly report the news if the facts are true, despite the risk that the magazine will be shut down. As a magazine with an Islamic perspective that is committed to the truth, Sabili's news reports are based on both an Islamic ethic as well as a journalistic ethical code.]

As the leading Islamic-oriented news magazine in Indonesia, Sabili positioned itself as a kind of watchdog of government. If it considered that government policies ignored the interests of society, Muslims in particular,

it would criticize them. Thus, how the Indonesian government dealt with Islamic terrorism became a major concern to Sabili. The analysis of Sabili's representation of terrorism is examined in detail in the next section.

Sabili Representations of Terrorism

Radicalism in Islam has a tendency to arise when global politics, economy, social and cultural factors contribute to an increase in pressure or marginalisation of the minority groups and their religion. Within this complex set of conditions, radical Islamists attempt to uphold resistance (Gunawan, 2006, p. 63) and often this process of reaffirming religious identity leads to a growth in radicalism. To some extent, some radical Islamists have misused Islamic values to justify their acts of terrorism. This condition can be used to explain the chain of terrorism acts that occurred in Indonesia.

An analysis of the representation of terrorism in the *Sabili* news magazine will elucidate the complexity of reporting terrorist events in a country where most of its citizens are Muslim. The extent to which *Sabili*'s perspectives of radical Islam and terrorism are framed by the social and political context in which it reports is discussed at length in this chapter. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. significantly affected *Sabili*'s reporting by shifting its focus to countering the western dominated, global media's marginalisation of Islam. The U.S. led global 'war on terror', precipitated by the events of 9/11 and informed by the idea of a fundamental incompatibility between Islam and the West, markedly changed the global political landscape. Islam as civilization was perceived as a new threat to the Bush government. As Huntington states (1998)—

It is the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflict of global

politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics (pp.22-49).

Bush's statement of intent to launch a 'crusade war', which was later revised as 'operation infinite justice', was followed by the introduction of a policy of war against so-called 'Islamic terrorists' (Abuza, 2003). It is within this context that *Sabili* felt it was necessary to protect Muslims from being accused as terrorists and to provide a more positive representation of Islam.

Sabili focused on three major issues in its news reporting of Islamic terrorist issues: (i) The American government's attack on Islam in Indonesia, (ii) The existence of *Jemaah Islamiyah* as a radical group that had adopted acts of terror to achieve its goals, (iii) The issuance of the Indonesian Terrorism Act and the capture of Islamic political radicals. This is signified by the intense reporting of these three interrelated issues and the use of an in-depth, investigative reporting. The magazine's focus on these issues strongly related to *Sabili*'s objective as a news magazine advocating Muslim interests. The following analysis of the reporting of these three issues is divided into sub headings.

1. *The American government's attack on Islam in Indonesia*

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. provided the basis for Bush to declare a 'war on terror' (see Tuman, 2003). To some political analysts, this new U.S. foreign policy aimed to marginalise Islam's role in the international world. The double standard policy of the U.S. government toward the Israel-Palestine conflict and the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq had become clear evidence of this (*Sabili*, No. 8/ Vol. X/2002).

Thus, when terrorist attacks occurred in Indonesia, some Islamic scholars and activists warned of the possibility of involvement by America intelligence agencies. This issue was strongly represented in *Sabili* news item as follow—

...looking at the type of the bomb and the impact of the blast, many people, especially political analysts, suggested that the perpetrators of the bomb attacks involved foreign parties. They sensed it had a strong link to the terrorism issue that was campaigned by America to all over the world, including Indonesia.

A political analyst of the University of Indonesia, Prof. Dr. M. Budyatna gave his comment, "It is possible this was engineered by foreigners so that there would be a strong reason for them, especially America, to attack hard-line groups considered to be terrorists"...

According to information received by the head of the Islamic Defender Front (FPI), Habib Riziq Shihab, a press release from the American embassy was issued after intelligence was passed on by the CIA. There was only one American victim of the Bali bombing. This was well out of proportion to the amount of American citizens that were in Kuta, Bali at the time of the bombing...

The mooring of a number of foreign warships especially from the United States in the Benoa Sea, Bali several days before the Bali bombing had invited suspicion among Balinese...Soon after the ships moored, they sterilised the area within 500 metres from the ships...According to Yasril, foreign intervention was meant to weaken Indonesia's bargaining position in the international world.

It is difficult to ignore that the bombings in Bali and Manado were foreign interventions to marginalise and attack Muslims, especially those who were accused as terrorists... (*We*

are under attack, *Sabili*, No. 8/Vol. X/2002).

Similar representation of the issue also appeared in the 2003 and 2004 reporting as follow —

Former Director of Coordinating Agency for National Intelligence (Badan Koordinator Intelejen Nasional or BAKIN) AC Manullang states, "The Marriott Hotel bombing strongly relates to international interests that attempt to create chaos situation in Indonesia. The goal was to create an image of unsafe Indonesia. They create an opinion as if Al-Qaeda network exists in Indonesia and that Islam equates to terrorism. This is similar to what the US, Israel and Western European governments did toward Iraq" (*Islam condemned, Islam accused, Sabili*, No. 3/Vol XI/2003).

Since the Bali and current bombing events, I keep saying that these are scenarios of state of the art master mind. Al-Qaeda or Jemaah Islamiyah were unlikely launched the bombings. There might be possibility, but were unconsciously sacrificed and used by those behind these big scenarios (*Sabili's* interview report with Intelligence analyst, Soeripto, *Uncover the mastermind*, No. 6/ Vol. XII/2004).

The representation of this issue appeared in 2002, 2003, and 2004 news coverage. *Sabili* use strict and straight forward news reporting style. From the three news items above, *Sabili* openly portrayed the terrorist attacks as part of a global conspiracy orchestrated by Western (American) governments to shape global opinion that Indonesia in particular and Southeast Asia in general had become a terrorist haven. In particular, *Sabili* portrayed the scenario as an attempt to attack Muslims who were regarded

as the new threat to Western democracy and values.

At the same time, *Sabili* also criticised the Indonesian government for its weak attitude toward the American government and its allies which tended to follow the interests of Western governments as a pre-condition of obtaining international aid. Consequently, any policies issued by the Indonesian government in relation to combating terrorism, from *Sabili's* perspective, were likely to please Western governments but tended to ignore the interest of Muslims in Indonesia. To *Sabili*, the reporting of this issue was important to show how the Indonesian government had reacted toward the terrorism events and how this reaction had negatively impacted the life of Muslims in Indonesia.

The representation of this issue is closely related to *Sabili's* vision as a media outlet advocating the interests of Muslims. In its company profile, *Sabili* positions itself as a publication for those who are interested in Islam or Muslims. According to its editor-in-chief,

Paling tidak ada dua hal yang perlu dipertimbangkan dalam pemilihan berita. Pertama adalah kepentingan berita terhadap umat Islam dan relevansi dengan visi dan misi kami. Kedua adalah bagaimana kami memberitakan isu tersebut melalui perspektif Islam, karena sebuah isu dapat diberitakan dari berbagai perspektif (Sabili Interview, 2006).

[There are at least two things that we have to consider in news selection. Firstly is the significance of the news to Muslims and the relevance to our vision and mission. Secondly is how we portray the issue through an Islamic perspective, as one issue can be represented in a number of different ways.]

In its representation, *Sabili* relied on a variety of sources — academics, intelligence

analysts and legislative officers—which supported the editorial perspective of the magazine. *Sabili's* perspective on this issue was based on the understanding that Islam never teaches violence and radicalism and that when examining the root cause of terrorism other political, economic and social factors must be taken into consideration. This perspective was clearly represented in *Sabili's* other news item entitled *Terorisme musuh Islam* (Terrorism is Islam's enemy) (No. 3/Vol XI/2003) which said as follows—

Islam is a religion that teaches love and passion and is against terrorism...

Toward those who commit terror by killing, Islam adopts *qhisash* law which means those who kill must be killed. The goal is to eradicate terrorist networks at the root....

Terrorising with explosives, bombing public places and killing innocent people are destructive forms that Islam really hates.

Thus, if there were radical groups that had adopted acts of violence in the name of Islam, according to *Sabili's* editor-in-chief,

Kita seharusnya tidak hanya melihat keradikalan mereka, tapi kita juga harus kritis untuk melihat akar masalah atau penyebab keradikalan mereka. Biasanya keradikalan mereka disebabkan oleh ketidakpuasan terhadap kebijakan pemerintah. Pemerintah agaknya kurang sensitif terhadap mereka. Pada kasus FPI, mereka bertindak radikal dengan menyerang kafe, misalnya, dalam pandangan mereka, pemerintah telah mengabaikan dan membiarkan tempat-tempat semacam ini merusak moral generasi muda.

Kedua, saya juga melihat ada beberapa upaya untuk

meradikalisasi mereka melalui provokasi seperti dalam kasus terorisme. Kami menemukan fakta ada upaya kelompok tertentu memprovokasi dan meradikalisasi mereka melalui beragam cara. Mereka diprovokasi, diberi senjata dan disusupi intelijen yang menjadikan mereka lebih radikal (Sabili Interview, 2006)

[We must not only see their radicalism, but we must be critical to see the root or causal factor of their radicalism. Usually their radicalism is caused by their dissatisfaction toward government policies. It seems that government has not been too sensitive to them. In the case of the Islamic Defender Front (*FPI*), they radicalised by destroying cafes because, from the perspective of *FPI* followers, the government has ignored and let these kinds of places ruin the morals of the young generation.

Secondly, I also see that there have been attempts to radicalise them through provocation as in the case of terrorism. We found the facts that there have been attempts by certain groups to provoke and radicalise them through a variety of forms. They are provoked, armed and infiltrated by intelligent which have made them become even more radical.]

In relation to the changing practices of the press in Indonesia, the representation of this issue, again shows how the press is now free to report news that is critical toward government. The reporting of this issue was carried out using a professional, critical and smart style which promoted the interests of Muslim. In reporting on the issue of America's attack on Islam in Indonesia, *Sabili* sought to balance the coverage of Western media that tended to marginalise Islam. At the same time, it could play its role as

the instrument for the unity of Islamic society and provide a better understanding of Islam to the public. To *Sabili*, this role was vital as Muslim had entered a potentially destabilising period following the terrorist attacks in the U.S. and domestically. As an important contributor to the growing debate over the issue of whether there were radical groups who used terror in the name of Islam, *Sabili* felt it was its obligation to uncover the facts which received less attention by other news media.

2. *The existence of Jemaah Islamiyah*

Another important issue that became *Sabili's* concern following the domestic terrorist events was the existence of *Jemaah Islamiyah* as the perpetrator of these attacks. *Sabili* explicitly reported *Jemaah Islamiyah*. *Sabili*, however, discussed *Jemaah Islamiyah* within a context of Islamic teaching, and so the status of the radical organisation was represented in distinctly ambiguous terms.

Whether *Jemaah Islamiyah* really existed or not had become a significant issue following the Bali bombing and the JW Marriot Hotel attacks. To some political analysts and terrorism experts, *Ji* did exist and had a loose organisational structure, whereas to others, the global attack on Islam in Indonesia had used the existence of *Ji* as an excuse to fight Islamic activists. The debate over this issue had dominated *Sabili* news reporting following the terrorism events. *Sabili* strictly represented the issue of the existence of *Ji* as an attempt to seize the role of Islam in the international world. This is evident in the following news —

Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, stated that there should be no parties that deny the fact that acts of terrorism did exist in Indonesia. "Terrorism is at the front of our eyes," he said.

On the other hand, Vice President Hamzah Haz, when asked by press over the issue of Bali bombing, said that there was no al-Qaidah network

in Indonesia. A similar statement was expressed by the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Yusril Ihza Mahendra and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hasan Wirayuda.

Since the issue of terrorism was brought to surface, no evidence has proved the existence of the al-Qaeda network in Indonesia. America and its allies like Singapore had accused some Islamic figures in Indonesia such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Habib Rizieq Shihab and others of involvement in international terrorism. The accusation, however, was never proved... (*We are under attack*, *Sabili*, No. 8/Vol. X/2002).

Jemaah Islamiyah had suddenly become a frightening name to America. Like al-Qaidah, this name had been considered dangerous and must be put into the terrorist network list that the world must fight against.

...Just a few hours following the Bali tragedy, American government directly pointed out the *Jemaah Islamiyah (Ji)* network as the likely perpetrator. From the perspective of Western intelligence, *Ji* is part of the al-Qaida network in Southeast Asia that is against western countries, especially America.

Some figures denied the existence of *Ji*. "As far as I know, there is no *Jemaah Islamiyah* group in Indonesia," said Deliar Noer...A similar opinion was given by the general secretary of the Indonesian Islamic Leaders Assembly (MUI), Prof. Dien Syamsudin. "There is no *Jemaah Islamiyah* in Indonesia. I have also received information that there is no *Jemaah Islamiyah* in

Malaysia,” said Din. He regretted the Indonesian government’s rushed actions and the tendency to follow the interests of imperialist America.

How is the concept of *Jemaah Islamiyah* understood according to Islam? Umar bin Khathab said, “There is no Islam without followers (jemaah), there is no jemaah without leadership (imamah), no imamah without obedience (taat) and no obedience without oath (baiat).”...Jemaah is one of the right ways to simplify differences within individuals. Within jemaah, individuals with similarities are united... (*Stand for Jemaah Islamiyah, Sabili*, No. 9/Vol. X/2002).

In the first news item above, *Sabili* stressed the inconsistency of the Megawati government in dealing with the issue of terrorism. This inconsistency was represented through the conflicting statements made by the Coordinating Minister of Politic and Security and Minister of Defence against statements from the vice president and Minister of Justice and Human Rights. Before the bombing, Vice President Hamzah Haz always denied there were terrorists living in Indonesia. Even after the Bali Bombing attack, the vice president reminded the public not to easily jump to a conclusion regarding the issue. On the other hand, Matori Abdul Jalil, the Minister of Defence, immediately accused Al-Qaidah of the bombing. This situation had given a bad impression of Megawati government’s performance in dealing with the domestic terrorist issue and resulted in her poor showing in the 2004 presidential election. Also, she had failed in handling her tension with the former coordinating minister of politics and security Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono prior the election. The International Crisis Group, in its report *Indonesia Briefing* on October 2002, gave its statement as follows—

Before 12 October, President Megawati’s re-election in 2004

seemed certain. Her popularity had steadily eroded but few could think of any alternative... But the president’s performance after the Bali bombings appalled many within her own party. Some diplomats and foreign business executives noted with approval that she went to Bali in the immediate aftermath of the bombings, held three cabinet meetings in as many days, and issued the anti-terror decree. But Indonesians saw no effort on her part to direct policy or to bring her unruly cabinet into line to convey the image of a united government with a sense of purpose. One commentator said she had shown no emotion when she spoke of the bombing, no sense that she was angered at the devastation or touched by the loss of life, although she undoubtedly was.

Although the Megawati government eventually took affirmative action over the attacks, a rushed decision by government officers to combat terrorism, from *Sabili*’s perspective, was the result of pressure by the American government as part of its purported attack on Islam in Indonesia, as discussed in the previous section. The implied meaning signifies how this news magazine warned the government not to be dictated easily by Western governments, for example through the accusation that some Islamic leaders in Indonesia were involved in international terrorism.

Thus, principally *Sabili* denied the existence of *Jemaah Islamiyah* as a terrorist organisation not because of its support of terrorism but that it believed that it was part of the American government’s strategy to destabilise Islam in Indonesia and capture Islamic activists. This scenario can parallel the situation under the New Order government in the 1970s. As *Sabili*’s editor-in-chief explained—

Kita pernah mengalami saat dimana umat Islam diadu domba. Tahun 1970an, pemerintah Orde Baru melalui Bakin telah

memanipulasi beberapa pemimpin Darul Islam untuk melakukan serangan atas nama agama yang dapat dianggap sebagai ancaman terhadap stabilitas dan keamanan nasional. Perlawanan ini pada akhirnya berhasil diberantas oleh militer melalui penangkapan beberapa aktivis Islam. Tujuan dari tindakan ini adalah untuk melegitimasi penggunaan kekerasan oleh pemerintah terhadap mereka yang dianggap mengancam keamanan stabilitas nasional (Sabili Interview, 2006).

We had an experience where Muslims were played against each other. In the 1970s, the New Order government through its intelligence agency, the Coordinating Agency for Intelligence (*Bakin*), had manipulated some former leaders of *Darul Islam* to launch some attacks that were considered threats toward national stability and security in the name of religion. This resistance was eventually eradicated by the military through the capture of some of the Islamic activists. The aim of this movement was to legitimize the government's use of violence toward those who were considered threats toward national stability.

In the second news item, *Sabili* denied the existence of *Ji* in Indonesia by questioning reports from Western analysts such as *Inside al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, written by Rohan Gunaratna. In his report, Gunaratna suspected the possibility of some Islamic groups like Islamic Defender Front (*FPI*) and Indonesian Mujahidin Assembly (*MMI*) to have been approached by Al-Qaeda. In addition to criticising Western terrorist analysts *Sabili* felt it was necessary to explain the meaning of *Jemaah Islamiyah* itself to avoid a misunderstanding of the concept. This article was considered crucial so that both the Islamic community as well as

others did not narrow the concept merely to a radical group whose existence was still questioned.

The editorial position and the news representation that *Sabili* had taken over the issue cannot be separated from the intense exposure of foreign news media which tended to generalise Islam as a violent religion. *Sabili*, for instance, had included in its No. 3, Vol. XI edition the statement from *The Strait Times* (a Singapore newspaper) that the Bali Bombing and J. W. Marriott Hotel attacks were launched by *Jemaah Islamiyah*. The issue of the existence of *Jemaah Islamiyah* was strongly related to the confession of the late Omar al-Farouq. Through news item entitled *Singapura, maling teriak maling* (Singapore, a thief that scream a thief) and *Gaya media jualan 'teror'* (Media style in selling 'terror'); *Sabili* reported that Singapore was the first country that accused Ba'asyir as the leader of *Ji*. *Sabili* included the statement of senior minister Lee Kuan Yew which was quoted by *the Strait Times*. *Sabili* portrayed this issue as a provocative act from Singapore. Thus, through its reporting *Sabili* attempted to counter the unbalanced reporting of foreign news media that tended to marginalise Islam.

To construct its own distinct representation of the issue, *Sabili* adopted two news reporting strategies. Firstly, it reported the many conflicting statements of government officers. This was intended to represent the unreadiness of government in managing terrorism. Secondly, *Sabili* interviewed a great number of Islamic figures and scholars.

Its distinct representation of the issue also strongly relates to the vision and mission of this news media institution. As stated in its company profile (2006), *Sabili's* vision was to be the 'information controlling and advocacy media for Muslims'. Two of its six mission statements were 'to keep the faith and unity of Muslims and to support Islamic law' and 'to present Islamic teachings completely based on Al-Quran and Sunnah', although *Sabili* also realised that different Muslims perceive Islam differently.

In relation to the development of the press, the representation of this issue by *Sabili* indicates a change in the way news media criticised government. During the New Order authoritarian regime the typical way of criticising government was called “criticising with compliment”, in which the press manoeuvred between the poles of limitation and prohibition (Prayudi, 2004, p.102). In the era of reform, the press was free to criticise government as long as it was done in accordance with the press code of ethics and Press Act (Astraadmaja, 2001). From *Sabili*'s point of view, the approach taken over the issue of the existence of *Jemaah Islamiyah* was an attempt to defend the interests of the public, in particular the Islamic community. Thus, there was no anxiety that there might be pressure from the community or other parties toward *Sabili* as a news media institution. *Sabili* encouraged their readers to be suspicious of the whole idea of *Jemaah Islamiyah*'s existence as a terrorist organisation as they feared that an acknowledgement of such an organisation would precipitate serious government abuses against Muslims—the sort of excesses that were experienced during the New Order period. *Sabili*'s editorial board feared that even a democratically elected government might exceed its authority, using the existence of *Ji* as an excuse for rounding up politically active Islamists who had no association with violence, terrorism or *Ji* specifically.

3. The issuance of the Terrorism Act and the capture of Islamic activists

One of the issues that surfaced following the Bali bombing was the need for regulation so that the Indonesian government could take legal action and at the same time would not be seen to have violated human rights. There were high tensions following the issuance of the Terrorism Act. Some supported this government move as a way to legally combat terrorism, whereas others warned the government not to misuse the Terrorism Act to capture those who were considered as a threat toward the existing government. This fear of government misuse was based on past history, particularly under the New Order government through *Komando Operasi*

Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban or *KOPKAMTIB* (the Operation Command of Security and Order Restoration), where many Islamic leaders considered a threat to the government were imprisoned. Just like *The Jakarta Post*, this had become another important issue that was represented in the *Sabili* news magazine.

Since the Bali bombing, *Sabili* paid serious attention to the two correlated issues as described above. From the perspective of *Sabili*, the issuance of the Terrorism Act would certainly lead to the capture of Islamic activists. Further, *Sabili* was concerned that the issuance of this new legislation was due to external pressure from Western (America) governments as a requirement of receiving international aid. This analysis was represented in a number of *Sabili* news items such as follows—

...”The Islamic movement will face a difficult era,” said an Islamic leader, Ihsan Tandjung. Some parties stated that with the issuance of the Anti Terrorism Act, the dark period between the state and Indonesian Islamic community would return to the vague period as in the early 1980s. “It could even be darker than when Indonesia was controlled by Soeharto-Benny Moerdani under which gross human rights violations occurred, such as the Tanjung Priok tragedy in 1984,” said the *Sabili* news source.

On this issue, the Secretary General of the Indonesian Mujahidin Assembly (MMI) Irfan S. Awwas said, “the issuance of this act will be a serious threat to the Islamic movement in Indonesia in the future. It is because the security apparatus can sentence people merely based on unsubstantial evidence from intelligence. If this is the case, we will return to the Kopkamtib era as in the New Order in the past.”...

(*Conspiracy to destroy Indonesia, Sabili*, No. 9/Vol. X/2002).

Still relevant with the issuance of the Antiterrorism Act, *Sabili* emphasized on the impact of the implementation of the act as follows—

...Without the arrest letter, they ‘kidnapped’ Sofyan and took him to a car parked in front of his office. Sofyan’s family found out of his existence after receiving the arresting letter a few days later...

The arrest of Sofyan was one of the negative impacts of the implementation of Antiterrorism Act No. 15/2003. Based on this Act, the police was allowed to capture a person based on an intelligence report. Also, this act allowed authorities to arrest a person suspected of involvement in a terrorism network without the accompaniment of a lawyer (*Questioning the revision of the Antiterrorism Act, Sabili*, No. 4/Vol. XI/2003).

Ida Kurniati never thought that she would be treated roughly by the authorities. In the early hours of Thursday morning (31/3), four well-built officers knocked at her door and directly questioned her over her husband Jibril’s whereabouts...without showing any papers they searched the house of this Islamic activist...they took some pipes, a mobile phone and some other belongings.

‘Terror’ went on. On Monday (3/8), authorities returned to Ida’s home. This time they came with even more personnel...”Frankly I was surprised and shocked. Moreover some people

thought that my husband was really a terrorist,” said Ida...

Ida’s experience was typical of the way the police made arrests of Islamic activists. It was common that the police treated the activists inhumanly (*Eradicating terrorism with terror, Sabili*, No. 6/Vol. XI/2003).

Sabili thus presented an explicit stance on the Antiterrorism Act, presenting an emotive description of the true effects of the application of the Act on Islamic activists who were not necessarily terrorists. In constructing this representation, *Sabili* expected its readers, which consisted of young Muslims, members of Islamic movements and professionals that wanted to return to the true Islamic values, to be critical in approaching the issue of the Antiterrorism laws.

Principally, *Sabili* did not object to the issuance of the Antiterrorism Act, rather it was the potential misuse of the Act that it criticised. By questioning the revision of some chapters that may potentially violate human rights, *Sabili* criticized and at the same time warned the authorities of the discontent held by many Indonesian Muslims towards the new legislation. As a magazine with an Islamic perspective, it was deeply concerned that this Act would be systematically used to capture Islamic activists in the name of preventing further terrorist acts.

The capture of some Islamic activists had also invited criticism from a number of Islamic figures, namely the former chairman of the *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Welfare Justice Party) and now chairman of the Peoples General Assembly (MPR), Hidayat Nur Wahid who said that “the capture of activists followed by torture and the framing of them as terrorist suspects is a form of terror to marginalise Islam. This kind of terror will later diminish the democratization process in Indonesia” (*Sabili*, No. 6/Vol. XI/2003). The issue of the imprisonment of Islamic activists also invited massive demonstrations in cities such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Solo in Central Java. The Indonesian Islamic Propagation Assembly (*Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia* or *DDII*),

Islamic Network for Community (*Jaringan Islam untuk Umat* or *Jamiat*), Indonesian Mujahidin Front (*MMI*), Islamic Defender Front (*FPI*), Indonesian Islamic Leaders Assembly (*MUI*), and Islamic Brotherhood Forum (*FUI*), along with the wives of kidnapped Islamic activists, rallied on main streets and in front of police headquarters. They criticised the misuse of the Antiterrorism Act as a vehicle to imprison Islamic political dissidents instead of combating terrorism. *Sabili's* editor-in-chief gave his argument for their representation of the issue as follows,

Isu revisi Undang-Undang Anti Terorisme memang menjadi isu krusial bagi majalah kami karena media mainstream kurang memberikan perhatian, walau mereka memperingatkan pemerintah untuk berhati-hati dalam mengatasi isu ini. Media mainstream-seperti Kompas, Tempo, The Jakarta Post-cenderung memfokuskan pada proses penyelidikan dan penanganan korban dengan alasan isu-isu ini berhubungan dengan pembentukan citra pemerintah Indonesia di dunia internasional. Di sisi lain, kami juga memperhatikan ada aspek lain yang perlu diperhatikan pihak berwenang dalam perang melawan terorisme. Oleh karenanya, sebagai media dengan perspektif Islam, kami dengan tegas mengkritik revisi Undang-Undang Anti Terorisme yang pada intinya bertujuan menangkap aktivis Islam. Kami melihat ada agenda tersembunyi dari pihak berwenang. Konsekuensinya, representasi berita penangkapan aktivis Islam cenderung terbuka dan kritis (Sabili Interview, 2006).

[The issue of the revision of the Antiterrorism Act became crucial to our news magazine as mainstream media gave little attention to it, although they warned the government to carefully deal with the issue. Mainstream media-such as *Kompas*, *Tempo*, *The Jakarta Post*- tended to focus their news representation on the investigation process and the handling of the victim's based on the reason that these issues related to the image building of the Indonesian government in the international world. On the other hand, we noticed that there were other aspects that the authorities need to notice in the war against terrorism. Therefore, as a news media with an Islamic perspective, we strictly criticise the revision of the Antiterrorism Act that principally aims to capture Islamic activists. We perceived there was a hidden agenda from the authorities. Consequently, the news representation of the capture of Islamic activists was open and critical.]

The representation of these two correlated issues is also interesting in relation to the development of democracy in Indonesia in which every person or organisation can voice their aspirations freely and openly. The era of 'reform' and the unstable conditions during the early period of reformation impacted on the way the government handled this sensitive and divisive issue. The swift issuance of government regulation to deal with terrorism followed by revision of some of the chapters one year afterward signifies the un-readiness of the former Megawati government in managing terrorism. Consequently, criticism of the government's handling of the issue from Islamic figures and activists, as well as by Islamic news media, increased substantially during this period.

News media with a distinct Islamic perspective such as *Sabili* then represented this issue based on their editorial policies. Compounded by the phenomenon of freedom of the press and the capture of some Islamic activists, *Sabili* represented the issue through an open and critical reporting style. It criticized the government through the publication of interviews conducted with politicians, legislative members, academics and Islamic leaders. With its clear position as the media outlet which cared for Islam and Muslims, it sought to counter negative reporting of Islam. Nonetheless, as stated by its editor-in-chief,

Sabili berupaya mewujudkan hal ini melalui pelaporan berita yang profesional berdasarkan standard etika jurnalisme. Kami akan melaporkan tanpa ragu jika memang sebuah fakta dan kami tidak takut dibredel. Sebagai sebuah media berita Islam, kami berpegang pada prinsip kebenaran. Kami melakukan hal ini agar pemerintah mendengar, memahami dan mempertimbangkan saran-saran kami (Sabili Interview, 2006).

[*Sabili* attempted to achieve this through professional reporting based on an ethical standard of journalism. We will report without any hesitation if it is a fact and we are not afraid of being banned. As an Islamic news media, we hold on to the principle of truth. We do this in order for the government to listen, to understand and to consider our suggestions.]

Beside the representation of the two correlated issues above, another issue that *Sabili* considered important to represent was the impact of the capture of Islamic activists on their families. In its No. 5/Vol. XI/2003 edition, *Sabili* gave main coverage to this issue. It represented this issue from a humanitarian perspective. To achieve

this perspective, *Sabili* interviewed the families of imprisoned Islamic activists. By reporting on this issue, *Sabili* presented a different view of the impact the new Antiterrorism Laws. This can be seen from one of the news items as follows—

...Amir is Tamim's son, an Islamic activist kidnapped by the authorities on 14 August 2003. Since the kidnapping, the family's condition has deteriorated, especially his wife, Ummi Amir. For several days, his mother did not stop crying... Since the arrest of Tamim, his family felt very stressed. They felt as if the authorities were continuing to spy on them.

According to *Sabili*'s news source, the authorities had asked the principal not to employ the terrorist's wife. All teachers were asked to stay away from Ummi Amir. In the end, Tamim's wife, who had only been working in the school for a month, was 'dismissed' from the school. "I am confused what to do now whilst at the same time I have to buy my son's milk..." she said.

Sadly, Tamim's wife had to separate from Amir. She left him with her parents. "During a long trip, I kept crying for leaving Amir. I promise to get him back," she said... (*Activists kidnapped: listen to their family's scream, Sabili*, No. 5/Vol. XI/2003).

The representation of Tamim's family story above was only one among other stories that *Sabili* presented in the news items. In order to strengthen the representation, *Sabili* constructed this meaning through the implementation of feature writing. According to Keeble, "news features tend to contain more comment, analysis, colour, background and a greater diversity of sources than news stories and explore a larger number of issues at greater depth... In particular, their introduction, where the overall tone of pieces is set, tends to be more colourful and varied in style than that of hard

news” (1994, p. 244). Thus, through feature writing, *Sabili* attempted to influence its readers to also feel what the families of kidnapped Islamic activists had felt.

Here *Sabili* presented both explicit and implicit meanings. Explicitly, *Sabili* portrayed the impact of the arrest of the Islamic activists on their families. It criticised the way the security apparatus arrested suspected Islamic activists without any warrant. It can be said that *Sabili* was the only news media that placed any special attention on this issue.

Implicitly, *Sabili*'s representation of the issue encouraged the authorities to consider the impact of arresting people suspected of involvement in terrorism on their families. As in the case of the capture of Abu Dujana, suspected to be the secretary of *Jl* in mid 2007, the arrest was carried out in front of his wife and children. The arrest process itself was preceded by an explosion and was broadcast to an international television network. Sydney Jones, the director of International Crisis Group, raised serious concerns over the procedure of such arrests. In an evening lecture at the University of Melbourne in 2007, she said that “the arrest of suspected terrorists, which involves violence and is done in front of their children, will only create a trauma for the families. For the children, it may create a stigma that they must continue the struggle of their parents as part of what they call *jihad*.”

Conclusion

As a news magazine established under the authoritarian New Order regime *Sabili* has developed into a media institution highly critical of government. With its vision of being an ‘information controlling and Islamic advocating media’, *Sabili* clearly places itself as a news media that defends the interests of Islam and Muslims in Indonesia.

In its representation of terrorism that had been associated with Islam, *Sabili* took a clear position to defend Islam and to show that the religion was not synonymous with terrorism. Its press coverage focused on three main issues: the American government's attack on Islam in Indonesia, the existence of *Jemaah Islamiyah*

as a radical group that had adopted acts of terror to achieve its goals, and the issuance of the Antiterrorism Act and the subsequent capture of Islamic activists.

In general, *Sabili* looked at the bombing events as forming part of a western (American) government led conspiracy to shape global opinion that Indonesia in particular and South East Asia in general had become a terrorist haven. Implicit in this representation was *Sabili*'s criticism of the Indonesian government for its weak attitude tendency to follow the will of western (American) governments in return for international aid.

Sabili also denied the existence of *Jemaah Islamiyah* as a terrorist group and this was evident in many of its news reports. In reporting the issue *Sabili* did not give its support to this radical group, rather it saw that the impact of labelling *Jl* as a terrorist group was detrimental to Islamic activists and Islam in Indonesia in general. Further, it also warned the government and public of the possibility of the issue to create conflict within Islamic society as was the case when the New Order regime adopted Islamic marginalisation tactics of its own. The final issue *Sabili* represented was the enactment of the Anti-terrorism Act. It principally criticised the implementation of the Act as a violation of human rights. It was concerned that the Act would be systematically used to capture Islamic activists. In representing the issue *Sabili* gave attention to the impact of the arrests on the families of Islamic activists. This kind of news coverage was largely ignored by the mainstream press in Indonesia.

In sum, *Sabili*'s representation of the issue of terrorism as shown in this chapter was based on a distinct editorial vision and mission. In its news reports *Sabili* tended to interview sources which supported its editorial views and which explained how Islam was not identical

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