



Displaced members of the **minority Yazidi sect demonstrating against the Islamic State** in Arbil, north of Baghdad. Indonesia's **condemnation of IS is telling of the tone of Islam** in the country. Reuters pic

Indonesian ulama reject 'Islamic State'

CLEAR STAND:

Nation's leaders show opposition to Mid-East movement via real deeds and political will

IN the shadowy world of underground radical movements, alliances are formed and broken on a regular basis. Often, this is part of the tactic to keep their opponents guessing and may, sometimes, be intended to cloud the real manoeuvres and alliances that are being formed behind closed doors, sometimes without the knowledge of the ordinary members of the movements themselves, who remain clueless as to who they really serve and whose agenda is being advanced.

This was the case last week, when radical group Jamaah Ansar-ul Tauhid (JAT), under the leadership of notorious ulama Abu Bakar Bashir, broke up into two factions after Bashir demanded that the rank-and-file of the movement follow his lead and make a pledge of loyalty to the Islamic State (formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), or IS, movement, led by Abu Bkr al-Baghdadi in Iraq-Syria.

It was reported that half of the members of JAT refused to do so and were expelled by Bashir. More startling still was the revelation that among those kicked out of JAT were the sons of Bashir himself. That such groups fall

apart almost as soon as they are constituted is not new and not unique to this particular case.

Bashir was formerly the leader of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MII), but when he demanded that MII accept him as Caliph for life, he was soundly defeated by his own movement, who argued that nobody should be given that much power over a movement like MII. (Bashir, in turn, argued that there was no democracy in movements like MII and that the position of leader should be reserved only for the most deserving, namely himself.)

After being expelled from MII, he formed his own breakaway JAT movement, which now seems to have broken up again.

Notwithstanding these convolutions and internal revolts, these groups are troublesome, to say the least, and their violent actions across Indonesia have rendered terrible damage to the reputation of the country, scaring off visitors and investors alike, who have written Indonesia off as a country in perpetual crisis and on the verge of collapse.

That such small groups can do so much damage is particularly true today in the age of global media and sensationalism, where one isolated bomb attack in an obscure part of the country can be made known to the whole world in a matter of minutes.

It is, perhaps, this sense of fatigue and irritation with such radical groups that the government of Indonesia has "manned up" and confronted the

problem head-on.

Over the past few weeks, the country's Religion Minister Lukman Saifuddin has openly declared that IS was a threat to all religious communities in the country; the government and security forces have declared them a danger that has to be prevented from spreading; and, some leaders of radical groups, like Fron Pembela Islam, have already come under arrest.

The most recent proclamation against IS came from Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), the country's highest institutional body of religious scholars (ulama), who declared that IS' actions were un-Islamic, and that its violent deeds were contrary to the teachings and ethics of Islam.

At a time when so many governments seem paralysed before the advance of IS radicals, Indonesia has, at least, shown that it will take a stand and pay the political cost for doing so, if necessary.

The fact that the strongest criticism against IS has come from ministers, senior police and army commanders, and now, the all-important MUI, tells us something about the tone and tenor of Islam in Indonesia today, and that it is one of the few Muslim-majority countries in the world where terms like "moderation" and "tolerance" are not merely sugar-coated platitudes to be taken lightly, but where to be moderate means having to demonstrate your moderation with real deeds and political will instead.



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