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By Nurrisha Ismail

SYNOPSIS

Despite being banned in 2017, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia continues to encourage its adherents to demand an Islamic caliphate by inciting a sense of crisis and religious obligation. Shielded by its label of nonviolence, the group's resilience is due to its success in calling for a caliphate that would serve as a panacea for the suffering of Muslims worldwide.

COMMENTARY

On 27 April 2025, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) released a video where its leaders urged President Prabowo Subianto to send troops to fight in the Israel-Hamas war, besides demanding the urgent establishment of the *khilafah* (caliphate) to protect the *ummah* (global Muslim community).

This came after Indonesia's top Islamic scholars' body, Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), released a [statement](#) on 8 April 2025 declaring its full support for the *fatwa issued* by the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), which called for Muslim countries to declare *jihad* against Israel through political, economic, and military sanctions.

From November 2024 to February 2025, HTI had ramped up its operations, including online activities, despite its banned status. These included large-scale [physical rallies](#), updates on affiliate websites, and propagation of extremist rhetoric across social media.

Observers have speculated that the uptick in HTI's public activity is connected to Indonesia's 2024 presidential leadership transition. While former President Joko Widodo [banned](#) the pan-Islamist party in 2017, President Prabowo has maintained

[close ties with the Islamist camp](#) since 2019 as part of his electoral strategy, which may have emboldened HTI.

HTI's pervasive influence stems from its success in perpetuating a [sense of crisis](#) and religious obligation among adherents to alleviate the plight of the *ummah*.

While publicly [rejecting the use of violence](#), which has shielded the group from total suppression in Indonesia, HTI supporters have continued to propagate violent narratives online, including calls to serve as *mujahideen* (fighters) and exhortations to "slaughter" the enemy.

Reinforcing these sentiments, HTI leaders have exploited scriptural verses to deliberately frame offensive *jihad* as the key to "liberation". HTI spokesperson, Ismail Yusanto, asserted in one publication that the use of force is critical as "transgressors" who inflict harm on Muslims do not abide by any other "language".

This way, HTI ultimately undermines the vital tenets of peaceful coexistence in diverse societies, including the values of religious moderation and pluralism, on the pretext of countering the religious and sociopolitical persecution Muslims face.

Leveraging the Israel-Hamas War

HTI has consistently [exploited the Israel-Hamas war](#) to justify *jihad* and the establishment of the *khilafah*, framing both precepts as the only solution to the oppression of Muslims. Adherents are urged to fulfil their "religious duty" by advancing this agenda under the banner of its "*Aksi Bela Palestina*" (Action to Defend Palestine) movement.

HTI organised three major rallies between November 2024 and February 2025, with two calls to action: *#AynalMuslimun* (Where are the Muslims) and *#WeNeedKhilafah*. These rallies declared that "stopping the genocide in Palestine can only be accomplished by establishing the *khilafah* and mobilising the Islamic armies" against the "*kafir* (infidel) coloniser".

HTI's [rally in Jakarta outside the US Embassy](#) on 26 January 2025 was branded "*Isra' Mi'raj Aksi Bela Palestina*". This rally combined religious observance of *Isra' Mi'raj* – a significant event in Islam commemorating Prophet Muhammad's night journey from Mecca to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem followed by his ascension to heaven – with actions of solidarity for Palestine. The livestream of the rally accrued over 100,000 views online.

HTI's media coverage of the event showed supporters vociferously supporting proclamations that only *jihad* and *khilafah* offer a "total solution". The rally called on young people to strengthen their resolve and serve as fighters in the obligatory *jihad*.

One week later, on 2 February 2025, [coordinated rallies](#) were launched simultaneously across 21 different provinces. At least 17,000 people were involved in campaigns across East, West, and Central Java, South Kalimantan, Yogyakarta,

and South Sumatra. Rally leaders continued to propagate incendiary narratives, calling for supporters to join in the “destruction of America and its allies”.

Capitalising on Domestic Discontent

Online sentiments from HTI supporters indicate that the group has effectively capitalised on domestic discontent arising from sociopolitical and economic issues to ignite calls for *jihad* and the establishment of the *khilafah*.

HTI sympathisers who tuned into the livestream of demonstrations expressed their overwhelming support, calling for Muslims to break free from the “shackles of the *kufir* (disbelieving) system” and integrate *dakwah* (proselytising) and *jihad* into Indonesia’s foreign policy.

Others responded to the 2 February rallies by glorifying protestors as “chosen by God” to defend the religion, besides frequently quoting the verse “kill them where you find them” to incite violence in service of the cause.

HTI has also exploited political issues in Indonesia, such as systemic corruption, recent provincial-level gaffes, including the government’s [walk-back](#) on directives concerning the sale of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and the ill-advised [installation](#) of marine fences in Banten (West Java) that affected the livelihood of fishermen.

Compounding Factors

HTI’s online presence has promoted its exclusivist ideology across mainstream social platforms and sustained an active community of pro-*khilafah* supporters. One [news report](#) noted at least 127 social media accounts and 47 websites dedicated to promoting HTI narratives.

Some of these social media accounts have explicitly denounced religious moderation and pluralism as instruments of the “colonial agenda”, which have led Muslims to “compromise” their faith. This narrative seeks to compel adherents to reject out-groups, threatening Indonesia’s social fabric as a diverse multicultural society.

HTI leaders have also sought to empower themselves and their supporters by characterising President Prabowo’s administration as supportive of the movement. Online accounts have implored adherents to bolster their efforts in service of HTI activities based on the premise that “change” is possible under the Prabowo administration.

Additionally, pro-Islamic State (IS) Indonesians interacting with HTI content online have taunted HTI adherents and further incited violence, urging supporters to take “real” action for the sake of the *ummah*.

Conclusion

HTI's longstanding influence is due to its success in presenting a vision of an Islamic caliphate that will be the panacea for the suffering of Muslims globally.

By inciting a sense of crisis and religious obligation, especially through exploiting geopolitical issues and discontent at home, HTI has entrenched the idea that its exclusivist ideology is integral to alleviating sociopolitical grievances and transgressions against Muslims.

The future of Indonesia's democracy and social cohesion depends largely on how effectively society resists the divisive influence of contentious extremist actors, and whether the state, religious leaders, and civil society can counteract such influence decisively.

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