

## The Thinker: Armed Online

Muh Taufiqurrohman | May 10, 2011

The recent arrest of 20 suspected terrorists linked to the spate of book bombs revealed the danger of online radicalization. Four of these terrorists were said to have mastered bomb-making techniques through the Internet.

Online radicalization is taking place in Indonesia and Indonesian Muslims are bombarded by radical Web sites advocating jihad. A Nanyang Technological University researcher has noted that to date there are at least 250 radical Indonesian-language Web sites. This number is worrying and a significant jump given that in 2007 there were only 13 such Web sites. Even more alarming is the fact that some online forums such as At Tawbah and Al Busyro provide avenues for discussion on topics related to bomb making.

Due to the danger of these Web sites in radicalizing Indonesian Muslims, there is increasing urgency for the National Anti-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) to counter this online radicalization. It is important for the BNPT to take the following steps.

The BNPT needs to set up a unit under the deputy for prevention, protection and deradicalization to counter the online threat. To successfully run such a unit, the agency would need legal backing from the House of Representatives. The legal architecture should support the BNPT to shut down Web sites that preach radicalism or advocate intolerance, violence or terrorism. Clearly defined legislation would avert accusations that the it was acting against the freedom of speech

In addition, research institutions such as the Australian Strategic Policy Institute have suggested that government agencies such as BNPT need sophisticated technical and human resources. Technical resources include secure, light-speed Internet connections and the ability to access and view radical Web sites. In terms of human assets, staff must have linguistic, analytical and technical skills. They will need specialized training in confronting online radicalization from institutions and experts in the area. Investigative skill in particular is needed to uncover the identity and location of Web site operators and visitors.

Staff working to counter online radicalization should be up to date with the latest trends and developments in cyberspace. This is vital as radical Web sites often employ people with expertise in information technology who are skilled at hiding their online identity. For instance, one Indonesian Web site — [www.voa-islam.com](http://www.voa-islam.com) — was designed and managed by a graduate of the Telkom Institute of Technology (STT Telkom).

The new body should comprise two subunits for monitoring and disruption. As outlined in latest International Crisis Group report, the monitoring subunit should consist of linguists fluent in Arabic and English who have a good knowledge of the global jihad movement. These linguists should monitor Arabic and English radical Web sites frequently visited by Indonesian extremists. They must also analyze the connections between Indonesian and foreign jihadis based on monitored online communications. Their analysis will be used to mark tactical or ideological shifts within the Indonesian radical community.

The monitoring unit will also need to employ experts in jihadism and terrorism to monitor Indonesian radical Web sites. They will be tasked with pinpointing the actors behind the online radicalization and analyzing how they are shaping public opinion. The experts' analysis will then be used by the next subunit to disrupt the radical networks.

In order to disrupt online radicalization, the second subunit must first refute the radical ideologies spread by through these Web sites. It must also tackle the vast amounts of information on bomb making, hacking, surveillance and assassination, as well as the videos showing violence, military training or preaching extremism. Thirdly, the subunit should identify visitors to radical Web sites to find the extremists who intend to carry out acts of terror. This will help police to arrest potential terrorists and prevent future attacks.

Working with the Communication and Information Ministry, this subunit should hack and shut down violent and radical Web sites, while leaving those that function more as a platform for debate, infiltrating them to further promote arguments against radical ideologies.

Finally, while online radicalization is a growing threat, the BNPT must not neglect the radicalization that is occurring in mosques, Islamic boarding schools, universities and other community centers.

*Muh Taufiqurrohman is a senior analyst with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.*