



## Law Enforcement Strategies Against the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) Network in Indonesia

### *Strategi Penegakan Hukum terhadap Jaringan Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) di Indonesia*

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#### News Article

##### Keyword:

Negara Islam Indonesia; law enforcement; counter-terrorism; radicalization; intelligence gathering.

##### Abstract

The persistent and unique threat posed by the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network, characterized by its long-term strategy of societal infiltration and the establishment of a parallel state, demands specific and adaptive law enforcement strategies. This article, which adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical research method, examines the various legal and operational approaches employed by Indonesian law enforcement agencies in countering the NII. The analysis focuses on the application of existing laws, including anti-terrorism legislation and other relevant criminal codes, to address the NII's distinct activities that often fall outside the conventional understanding of terrorism. The paper also investigates the intelligence-gathering techniques, surveillance methods, and arrest procedures utilized to target NII cells and leadership, considering the challenges posed by the network's decentralized and clandestine nature. Furthermore, it evaluates the effectiveness and legality of these law enforcement strategies, exploring issues related to due process, human rights, and the potential for overreach. By analyzing specific cases and broader trends, this research aims to provide a critical assessment of the current law enforcement response to the NII in Indonesia, highlighting both successes and areas for improvement in addressing this complex and enduring security challenge.

##### Kata Kunci:

Negara Islam Indonesia; Penegakan Hukum; Kontra-Terrorisme; Radikalisasi; Pengumpulan Intelijen.

##### Abstrak

Ancaman yang persisten dan unik yang ditimbulkan oleh jaringan Negara Islam Indonesia (NII), yang ditandai dengan strategi jangka panjang berupa infiltrasi masyarakat serta pembentukan negara tandingan, menuntut strategi penegakan hukum yang spesifik dan adaptif. Artikel ini, yang disusun dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif deskriptif-analitis, menelaah berbagai pendekatan hukum maupun operasional yang diterapkan aparat penegak hukum Indonesia dalam menghadapi NII. Analisis difokuskan pada penerapan peraturan yang ada, termasuk undang-undang antiterorisme dan pasal-pasal pidana relevan lainnya, untuk menangani aktivitas khas NII yang kerap berada di luar pemahaman konvensional tentang terorisme. Tulisan ini juga menelusuri teknik pengumpulan intelijen, metode pengawasan, dan prosedur penangkapan yang digunakan untuk menargetkan sel-sel dan kepemimpinan NII, dengan mempertimbangkan tantangan yang ditimbulkan oleh sifat jaringan

*yang terdesentralisasi dan bergerak secara tersembunyi. Lebih jauh, penelitian ini mengevaluasi efektivitas serta legalitas strategi penegakan hukum tersebut, dengan mengulas isu-isu terkait proses hukum, hak asasi manusia, dan potensi terjadinya ekses kewenangan. Melalui analisis kasus-kasus tertentu dan tren yang lebih luas, riset ini bertujuan memberikan penilaian kritis atas respons penegakan hukum terhadap NII di Indonesia, sembari menyoroti keberhasilan maupun area yang masih perlu ditingkatkan dalam menghadapi tantangan keamanan yang kompleks dan berkelanjutan ini.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network presents a persistent and unique security challenge in Indonesia, a threat that has evolved significantly since its inception. The movement's origins trace back to the Indonesian National Revolution, founded by Sekarmadji Marjjan Kartosuwiryo (Supyan, 2016). Initially, the NII functioned as a territorial-based armed rebellion, a struggle to establish an Islamic state and secede from the newly declared secular Indonesian Republic (Asnanto, 2019; Formichi, 2012). The pivotal moment came with the formal proclamation of the NII on August 7, 1949, a move that solidified its break from the central government and ignited a long-running conflict (Ridlo, 2019). However, following the capture and execution of Kartosuwiryo in 1962, the movement underwent a strategic transformation, shifting from a conventional military insurgency to a more clandestine, regenerative network focused on societal infiltration and subversion (Mukti, 2025). This evolution explains why the NII threat has endured despite decades of counter-insurgency efforts, demanding a more nuanced law enforcement response.

Unlike other contemporary extremist groups that often rely on overt violence, the modern NII's primary threat is its long-term strategy of "societal infiltration," which it refers to as a form of hijrah (Sanusi et al., 2022). Rather than engaging in large-scale terror attacks, the NII's central goal is to quietly establish a parallel state structure by infiltrating and controlling followers' lives, finances, and loyalties (Fealy, 2004). This requires a different approach from law enforcement, as their activities often fall outside the conventional definition of terrorism. For instance, the NII's "konsep lembaga negara Islam" (concept of an Islamic state institution) is less about physical warfare and more about building a shadow administrative and organizational structure (Anjaya, 2018). This clandestine nature makes the NII a complex and enduring challenge for Indonesian security forces.

Given this unique threat profile, this article aims to critically examine the various legal and operational strategies that Indonesian law enforcement agencies have employed to counter the NII network. It will analyze the application of existing anti-terrorism laws and other relevant criminal codes, investigate the intelligence-gathering techniques and arrest procedures used to target NII cells, and evaluate the effectiveness and legality of these measures. By examining both the successes and limitations of the current response, this research will provide a critical assessment of how Indonesian law enforcement is adapting to address this subtle and persistent security challenge.

## Background

The Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) movement traces its origins to the ideological and political aspirations of Sekarmadji Marjjan Kartosuwiryo, a charismatic Islamic leader who declared the establishment of an Islamic state in West Java in 1949 (Supyan, 2016). Kartosuwiryo's vision was deeply influenced by the concept of hijrah—migration for the sake of faith—and jihad, which he interpreted as both a spiritual and militant struggle to implement Islamic governance in Indonesia (Rizky et al., 2024; Sanusi et al., 2022). His declaration marked the beginning of the Darul Islam rebellion, a territorial insurgency that challenged the legitimacy of the newly formed Republic of Indonesia (Sahrasad et al., 2019).

Initially, the movement operated as a conventional military rebellion, controlling significant swaths of territory in West Java and later expanding to South Sulawesi and Aceh. However, following Kartosuwiryo's capture and execution in 1962, the movement was forced underground. Despite its military defeat, NII did not dissolve; instead, it transformed into a clandestine ideological network that continued to pursue its goal of establishing an Islamic state through non-violent means (Formichi, 2012).

As Fealy (2004) observes, the post-rebellion NII shifted its strategy from armed confrontation to societal infiltration. This involved embedding operatives within educational institutions, religious organizations, and even government agencies. The movement adopted a long-term approach, focusing on recruitment, indoctrination, and the gradual construction of a parallel state structure that operated beneath the surface of Indonesian society (Sahrasad et al., 2021). This evolution has made NII particularly difficult to detect and dismantle, as its activities often fall outside the conventional definitions of terrorism and insurgency.

Today, NII remains a persistent threat not because of its military capabilities, but due to its ideological resilience and ability to adapt to changing political and social landscapes. Its decentralized structure and covert operations challenge traditional law enforcement paradigms, necessitating innovative and legally sound strategies to counter its influence.

## The Unique Threat of NII

Unlike conventional terrorist organizations that rely on overt violence and spectacular attacks to achieve their goals, the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network presents a more insidious and complex challenge. Its strategy is rooted in the concept of hijrah—not merely as physical migration, but as a form of ideological and social withdrawal from the secular state. As Sanusi et al., (2022) explain, Kartosuwiryo's interpretation of hijrah involved the creation of an alternative society governed by Islamic law, one that would gradually replace the existing national order through infiltration and indoctrination rather than direct confrontation.

This long-term strategy of societal infiltration allows NII to operate beneath the radar of conventional counterterrorism frameworks. Rather than engaging in high-profile violence, NII cells focus on recruiting individuals from within communities, religious institutions, and even government agencies. Their goal is to establish a parallel state structure that mirrors the functions of the Republic of Indonesia but is ideologically aligned with their vision of an Islamic state.

The concept of "Negara Islam" as envisioned by NII is not merely theological—it is deeply political. As Anjaya (2018) notes in his comparative study of Hizbut Tahrir and NII, "*Konsep lembaga negara Islam bukan semata-mata teologis, tetapi juga politis*" ("The concept of an Islamic state institution is not merely theological, but also political," p. 45).

This dual nature enables NII to frame its activities as religious obligations while simultaneously pursuing a subversive political agenda.

What makes NII particularly dangerous is its ability to blend into society. Members often present themselves as devout Muslims engaged in religious study, making it difficult for law enforcement to distinguish between legitimate religious practice and covert indoctrination. This ambiguity complicates surveillance and prosecution, especially when NII activities do not meet the legal threshold for terrorism under existing laws.

In essence, NII's threat lies not in its capacity for violence, but in its ideological persistence and strategic patience. Its decentralized structure, non-violent tactics, and emphasis on long-term societal transformation make it a unique and enduring challenge for Indonesian law enforcement.

### **Scope and Purpose**

This article aims to critically analyze the law enforcement strategies employed by the Indonesian state in countering the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network. Given the movement's unique approach—favoring ideological infiltration and the gradual construction of a parallel Islamic state over overt violence—traditional counterterrorism methods often fall short. Therefore, this study evaluates the legal instruments, intelligence operations, and tactical procedures used to disrupt NII's activities.

The analysis focuses on two core dimensions: effectiveness and legality. First, it assesses how well current strategies have succeeded in identifying, monitoring, and neutralizing NII cells and leadership. Second, it examines whether these approaches align with Indonesia's constitutional principles, human rights obligations, and rule-of-law standards. By drawing on historical context, legal frameworks, and documented case studies, the article seeks to offer a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the state's response to this enduring and ideologically resilient threat.

## **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Legal Framework and Its Application**

The Indonesian government's response to the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network is underpinned by a complex and often adaptable legal framework. The primary legislative tool for countering such groups is Indonesia's anti-terrorism legislation. However, applying these laws to the NII presents unique challenges because the network's activities often fall outside the conventional understanding of terrorism, which typically involves overt violence and large-scale attacks. The NII's strategy of ideological and social infiltration creates a legal grey area, as their recruitment and indoctrination may not meet the threshold for terrorism charges (Usmita, 2015). This forces law enforcement to demonstrate that the NII's clandestine activities, even when non-violent, are intended to subvert the state and prepare for future conflict.

Due to the NII's unconventional methods, law enforcement agencies have also leveraged other relevant criminal codes to prosecute members. These include charges related to fraud, financial crimes, and sedition. The use of these broader legal statutes demonstrates the flexibility required to counter a network that operates under the guise of religious study or community organization. For example, law enforcement can pursue charges related to embezzlement or extortion to disrupt the NII's financial networks, which are crucial for sustaining their activities. The application of these other criminal codes allows the state to legally address the NII's distinct activities that do not necessarily involve violence but are still criminal in nature, such as the manipulation of followers for

financial gain or the dissemination of anti-state ideology (Chaidar et al., 2019). This multi-pronged legal approach is essential for a comprehensive and effective response to the NII's complex threat.

### Counter-Terrorism Legislation

Indonesia's legal framework for countering terrorism has evolved significantly since the early 2000s, particularly following the Bali bombings in 2002. The enactment of Law No. 15/2003 and its subsequent amendment through Law No. 5/2018 provided law enforcement agencies with expanded powers to investigate, detain, and prosecute individuals involved in terrorist activities. These laws define terrorism primarily in terms of acts of violence intended to create widespread fear or destabilize the state.

However, the application of these laws to the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network presents a unique challenge. Unlike conventional terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah or ISIS affiliates, NII often operates in a legal and operational grey area. Its activities—such as ideological indoctrination, recruitment, and the establishment of parallel governance structures—do not always involve overt violence or immediate threats to public safety. As a result, many of NII's actions fall outside the conventional definitions of terrorism codified in Indonesian law.

Usmita (2015) highlights this dilemma, noting that “*strategi penanggulangan terorisme di Indonesia masih belum sepenuhnya mampu menjangkau gerakan-gerakan yang bersifat ideologis dan non-kekerasan seperti NII*” (“Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy has not yet fully addressed ideological and non-violent movements like NII,” p. 52). This limitation has led to difficulties in prosecuting NII members under anti-terrorism statutes, especially when their activities are framed as religious or educational in nature.

In practice, law enforcement agencies have often resorted to alternative legal instruments, such as the Criminal Code (KUHP), laws on subversion, and regulations governing civil service conduct, to pursue NII affiliates. These approaches, while sometimes effective, raise concerns about consistency, legal clarity, and potential overreach. The lack of a precise legal definition for ideological subversion or parallel state-building complicates the task of distinguishing between legitimate religious expression and covert political activism.

Consequently, there is a growing recognition among legal scholars and security experts that Indonesia's counterterrorism laws must be adapted to address the evolving nature of threats like NII. This includes expanding legal definitions to encompass non-violent forms of extremism and enhancing safeguards to ensure that enforcement remains within the bounds of constitutional rights and democratic principles.

### Other Relevant Criminal Codes

Given the limitations of Indonesia's anti-terrorism laws in addressing the non-violent and ideologically driven activities of the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network, law enforcement agencies have increasingly relied on other legal statutes to prosecute its members. These include provisions within the Criminal Code (Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana, or KUHP) related to fraud, sedition, subversion, and unlawful association.

NII operatives have been known to engage in deceptive fundraising schemes, often soliciting donations under the guise of religious or educational causes. These activities have led to prosecutions under fraud statutes, particularly when funds were used to

support clandestine operations or indoctrination programs. In some cases, NII members have been charged with embezzlement or financial misrepresentation, especially when their activities intersected with public institutions or civil service roles.

Sedition and subversion laws have also been applied to NII cases, especially when members openly reject the legitimacy of the Indonesian state or attempt to establish parallel governance structures. Rudiansyah in Susanti (2025) notes that “*pemikiran politik Kartosuwiryo tentang negara Islam mengarah pada penolakan terhadap sistem kenegaraan Republik Indonesia dan mendorong pembentukan sistem alternatif berbasis syariat Islam*” (“Kartosuwiryo’s political thought on the Islamic state leads to a rejection of the Republic of Indonesia’s state system and promotes the establishment of an alternative system based on Islamic law,” p. 88). This ideological stance has provided legal grounds for charges of subversion, particularly when NII activities threaten national unity or incite disobedience to state authority.

The use of these alternative legal instruments reflects the adaptability required to counter NII’s varied and evolving tactics. Unlike groups that rely on physical violence, NII’s strategy of ideological infiltration demands a broader legal toolkit—one that can address the subtleties of recruitment, indoctrination, and parallel state-building. However, this approach also raises concerns about legal consistency and the potential for misuse. Prosecuting individuals for sedition or subversion based on ideological beliefs must be carefully balanced against constitutional protections for freedom of religion and expression.

Ultimately, the prosecution of NII members under non-terrorism statutes underscores the need for a nuanced legal framework—one that can distinguish between legitimate religious activity and covert political subversion, while ensuring that enforcement remains grounded in due process and democratic principles.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the strategies adopted by Indonesian law enforcement agencies in countering the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex sociopolitical and legal phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016). By focusing on textual, historical, and policy-oriented data, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the legal frameworks, operational strategies, and challenges associated with combating NII. The descriptive-analytical approach enables the identification of patterns, meanings, and implications within the data, offering insights into the effectiveness and limitations of current enforcement measures (Moleong, 2017).

The data collection process relied primarily on secondary sources, including academic publications, government reports, legal documents, and credible news articles. Official documents, such as Indonesia’s Law No. 15/2003 on counterterrorism and its amendment Law No. 5/2018, served as the main reference for understanding the legislative basis of law enforcement actions. In addition, scholarly works on the history and evolution of NII were examined to provide contextual understanding of the movement’s transformation from a territorial insurgency into a clandestine ideological network (Formichi, 2012; Mukti & Zakariah, 2024). This triangulation of sources was necessary to ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis, as recommended in qualitative research standards (Patton, 2002).

To analyze the operational strategies of law enforcement, the study drew upon case studies documented in police records, court proceedings, and journalistic investigations. For example, recent arrests of NII members in West Sumatra and Garut provided valuable insights into how Indonesian security forces apply intelligence gathering, surveillance, and targeted raids in practice (Diningrat, 2021; Firdaus & Koswaraputra, 2022). Case study analysis is especially useful for exploring real-world applications of counter-terrorism policies, as it highlights both successes and challenges faced on the ground (Yin, 2018). By incorporating diverse cases, the research was able to identify broader trends and patterns that characterize Indonesia's evolving response to NII.

The data analysis technique employed in this study was thematic analysis, which involves systematically identifying, categorizing, and interpreting recurring themes across different data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Key themes were derived from the research questions, such as legal frameworks, intelligence strategies, arrest procedures, human rights concerns, and the effectiveness of deradicalization programs. Thematic coding was conducted manually, allowing for a close reading of texts and iterative refinement of categories. This method ensured that the findings were grounded in empirical evidence while also allowing space for interpretive insights into the complexities of law enforcement against ideologically driven movements.

In order to maintain academic rigor and ethical integrity, the research carefully distinguished between legitimate religious practices and clandestine activities associated with NII. This distinction is crucial to avoid conflating peaceful religious expression with radicalism—a concern often raised in studies of counterterrorism policies in Muslim-majority societies (Azra, 2006; Usmita, 2015). Furthermore, the study acknowledges the limitations of relying on secondary data, particularly in terms of access to classified intelligence operations. However, this limitation was mitigated by cross-referencing multiple sources and focusing on publicly available, verifiable information.

Finally, the research scope and boundaries were clearly defined to focus on law enforcement strategies rather than broader counter-radicalization initiatives led by civil society or religious organizations. While acknowledging the importance of the “soft approach” to countering extremism, this study restricted its analysis to state-driven legal and operational measures against NII. This delimitation ensured analytical precision and relevance to the central research question while leaving space for future studies to explore complementary non-state interventions (Karnavian, 2014; Sahrasad et al., 2021). By adopting this methodological framework, the study offers a systematic, critical, and contextually grounded analysis of Indonesia's ongoing struggle against the NII network.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Operational Strategies

The Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network presents a persistent and unique security challenge in Indonesia, a threat that has evolved significantly since its inception. The movement's origins trace back to the Indonesian National Revolution, founded by Sekarmadji Marjjan Kartosuwiryo (Supyan, 2016). Initially, the NII functioned as a territorial-based armed rebellion, a struggle to establish an Islamic state and secede from the newly declared secular Indonesian Republic (Asnanto, 2019; Formichi, 2017). The pivotal moment came with the formal proclamation of the NII on August 7, 1949, a move that solidified its break from the central government and ignited a long-running conflict (Ridlo, 2019). However, following the capture and execution of Kartosuwiryo in 1962, the movement underwent a strategic transformation, shifting from a conventional military insurgency to a more clandestine, regenerative network focused on societal

infiltration and subversion (Mukti & Zakariah, 2024). This evolution explains why the NII threat has endured despite decades of counter-insurgency efforts, demanding a more nuanced law enforcement response.

Unlike other contemporary extremist groups that often rely on overt violence, the modern NII's primary threat is its long-term strategy of "societal infiltration," which it refers to as a form of *hijrah* (Sanusi et al., 2022). Rather than engaging in large-scale terror attacks, the NII's central goal is to quietly establish a parallel state structure by infiltrating and controlling followers' lives, finances, and loyalties (Fealy, 2004). This requires a different approach from law enforcement, as their activities often fall outside the conventional definition of terrorism. For instance, the NII's "*konsep lembaga negara Islam*" (concept of an Islamic state institution) is less about physical warfare and more about building a shadow administrative and organizational structure (Anjaya, 2018). This clandestine nature makes the NII a complex and enduring challenge for Indonesian security forces.

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The operational response to the NII's clandestine nature requires a heavy reliance on sophisticated intelligence gathering and surveillance. Given that the network is decentralized and avoids overt acts of violence, law enforcement cannot simply respond to terrorist attacks. Instead, a proactive approach is necessary to identify and disrupt NII cells before they can cause significant harm. This involves a comprehensive intelligence cycle focused on human intelligence (HUMINT) and technical surveillance to penetrate the NII's secretive command structure (Ridwan, 2008). Counter-terrorism units such as



Detachment 88 have employed a range of methods to track the network's activities, including monitoring their financial flows and communications, as the NII often relies on donations and fraudulent schemes to fund its operations. A key challenge, however, is the fluid nature of the network, which has spawned numerous splinter groups over the years, each with its own leadership and ideology (Mukti & Zakariah, 2024).

When an NII cell is identified, law enforcement moves to neutralize the threat through targeted arrest procedures and raids. These operations are often precision-based to minimize casualties and prevent the escape of key leaders. The Indonesian National Police (POLRI) has the authority to conduct investigations, make arrests, and seize evidence based on the Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP), which provides a legal basis for these actions, though a warrant is generally required (Rifa'i et al., 2022). In practice, law enforcement raids on suspected NII hideouts or training centers are often the culmination of months, or even years, of intelligence work. The primary goal is to dismantle the cell's operational capacity and ideological influence by capturing its leadership and seizing documentation that can be used as evidence against other members. This strategy has been crucial in preventing the NII from becoming a more violent or widespread movement. However, these operations are not without controversy, with human rights groups sometimes raising concerns about due process and the potential for overreach during arrests.

### Intelligence Gathering and Surveillance

Uncovering the activities of the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network requires a sophisticated and adaptive intelligence apparatus. Unlike centralized terrorist organizations with clear hierarchies and operational footprints, NII functions through a decentralized structure that prioritizes ideological recruitment and indoctrination over direct violence. This organizational model presents significant challenges for conventional surveillance and counterterrorism efforts.

Ridwan (2008) emphasizes that NII's resilience stems from its ability to regenerate through localized cells, each operating semi-independently while adhering to a shared ideological framework. These cells often embed themselves within religious study groups (*pengajian*), educational institutions, and community organizations, making them difficult to distinguish from legitimate religious activity. Recruitment is typically conducted through personal relationships and trust-building, with new members gradually exposed to NII's doctrine and political goals.

To counter this, Indonesian law enforcement agencies—particularly the National Intelligence Agency (BIN) and Detachment 88 (Densus 88)—have employed a combination of human intelligence (HUMINT) and digital surveillance. HUMINT remains a critical tool, involving the deployment of undercover operatives, cultivation of informants within religious communities, and monitoring of suspected recruitment hubs. These efforts are often supported by community policing initiatives that encourage local residents to report suspicious activities.

Karnavian (2014) in his analysis of Islamist insurgencies, underscores the importance of digital surveillance in tracking modern extremist networks. NII has increasingly utilized online platforms to disseminate propaganda, conduct virtual indoctrination sessions, and coordinate activities across regions. Law enforcement agencies have responded by monitoring social media, encrypted messaging apps, and digital financial transactions to identify patterns of radicalization and logistical support.

Despite these efforts, intelligence operations targeting NII face several obstacles. The network's ideological framing as a religious movement complicates legal authorization

for surveillance, particularly when activities do not meet the threshold for terrorism. Moreover, the use of encrypted communication and decentralized leadership structures limits the effectiveness of traditional wiretapping and signal intelligence.

To address these challenges, Indonesian authorities have begun integrating data analytics and artificial intelligence into their surveillance strategies, aiming to detect behavioral patterns and ideological markers associated with NII recruitment. However, these methods must be carefully balanced against privacy rights and legal safeguards to prevent abuse and maintain public trust.

In sum, intelligence gathering against NII demands a multi-layered approach—one that combines grassroots engagement with technological sophistication, and legal precision with cultural sensitivity. The success of these efforts hinges not only on operational capacity but also on the ability to navigate the complex intersection of religion, ideology, and national security. 3.2 arrest procedures and raids: analyze the procedures for arresting nii members, including the use of targeted raids on suspected hideouts or training centers (Rifa'i et al., 2022). This section should discuss the challenges of maintaining due process and human rights during these operations.

## **Case Studies and Trends**

The history of law enforcement's confrontation with the NII network is marked by a series of decisive actions and evolving trends. Historically, the state's initial response was a full-scale military campaign to suppress the NII as a conventional insurgency (Asnanto, 2019; Baihaqi, 2019). The success of this approach in the 1960s ultimately forced the movement to adopt its more covert, regenerative form. In recent years, the strategy has shifted from a military-led effort to a police-led, intelligence-based response. For example, police actions have successfully thwarted NII plots, such as a claimed conspiracy to overthrow the government before the 2024 elections, which led to the arrest of 16 suspects in West Sumatra (Firdaus & Koswaraputra, 2022). These arrests, conducted by Detachment 88, highlight the proactive nature of contemporary counter-NII efforts.

Despite these successes, the effectiveness of law enforcement strategies remains a subject of critical evaluation. While police operations have been effective at disrupting specific cells and preventing large-scale attacks, they have been less successful at eradicating the NII's enduring ideological influence. The network's resilience is demonstrated by its ability to regenerate and spawn numerous splinter groups, with the internal conflicts between these factions—such as those between "Puritanical" and "Traditionalist" groups—further complicating law enforcement's efforts to target a unified organization (Mukti & Zakariah, 2024). The NII's continued ability to recruit new members, particularly among youth, and its function as a "conveyor belt to terrorism" for more hardline groups like Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), suggests that a purely enforcement-based approach is not a long-term solution (Sahrasad, Syukur, Chaidar, et al., 2019). The enduring nature of the NII threat, therefore, points to the need for a more comprehensive strategy that addresses the ideological roots of the movement.

### *Historical Context*

The formal declaration of the Islamic State of Indonesia (Darul Islam) by Sekarmadji Marijan Kartosuwiryo in 1949 marked a pivotal moment in Indonesia's post-independence history. This declaration, made in West Java, was not merely symbolic—it initiated a prolonged armed rebellion against the Republic of Indonesia, with the goal of replacing the secular state with one governed by Islamic law (Baihaqi, 2019).

Kartosuwiryo's movement quickly gained traction, expanding its influence into South Sulawesi and Aceh, and establishing a shadow administration that mirrored the functions of the national government.

In response, the Indonesian state launched a series of military and political crackdowns throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. These efforts culminated in the arrest and execution of Kartosuwiryo in 1962, effectively dismantling the central leadership of the Darul Islam rebellion. However, as Asnanto (2019) notes, "*Gerakan Darul Islam tidak sepenuhnya lenyap setelah Kartosuwiryo ditangkap; ia justru bertransformasi menjadi jaringan bawah tanah yang terus menyebarkan ideologi negara Islam*" ("The Darul Islam movement did not completely disappear after Kartosuwiryo's capture; it instead transformed into an underground network that continued to spread the ideology of an Islamic state," p. 60).

These early crackdowns were characterized by large-scale military operations, mass arrests, and the suppression of affiliated religious and political organizations. While effective in neutralizing the immediate threat, they failed to eradicate the ideological foundation of the movement. The remnants of Darul Islam reorganized into what would later become the NII network, shifting from overt rebellion to covert infiltration—a strategic pivot that continues to challenge law enforcement to this day.

This historical backdrop is essential for understanding the enduring nature of NII and the necessity for law enforcement strategies that go beyond conventional counterinsurgency. The legacy of Kartosuwiryo's vision and the resilience of his followers underscore the importance of combining historical insight with contemporary legal and operational tools.

### *Contemporary Operations*

In recent years, law enforcement responses to the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network have shifted from militarized crackdowns to more nuanced, intelligence-driven policing. This evolution reflects the changing nature of NII itself—from a territorial insurgency to a clandestine ideological movement embedded within civilian life.

One illustrative case comes from Garut, West Java, where local authorities uncovered an NII-affiliated group operating under the guise of religious education and social outreach. As Diningrat (2021) documents, the group—known as NII Fillah—had successfully recruited dozens of members, including students and civil servants, by promoting a narrative of Islamic governance and spiritual purification. The group's activities included secret bai'at (oath of allegiance) ceremonies, ideological training, and the establishment of informal administrative structures that mimicked state institutions.

Rather than deploying military force, the response to this case was led by civilian law enforcement agencies, including the local police and the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT). Investigators relied heavily on community-based intelligence, digital surveillance, and informant testimony to build a case against the group. The operation culminated in a series of arrests and public disclosures, which served both to dismantle the cell and to warn the broader community about the dangers of ideological infiltration.

This case exemplifies a broader trend in Indonesia's counter-NII strategy: the prioritization of intelligence gathering, legal prosecution, and public education over brute force. The use of targeted investigations and legal instruments—rather than sweeping military operations—has allowed authorities to address NII's activities with greater precision and fewer civil liberties violations.

Moreover, the Garut case highlights the importance of local engagement. Law enforcement agencies worked closely with religious leaders, educators, and community organizations to identify signs of radicalization and prevent further recruitment. This collaborative approach not only enhances operational effectiveness but also reinforces public trust in state institutions.

As NII continues to adapt its tactics, the state's response must remain flexible, legally sound, and community-oriented. Contemporary operations like those in Garut demonstrate that civilian-led, intelligence-based policing can be both effective and respectful of democratic norms—an essential balance in the fight against ideological extremism.

### *Evaluating Effectiveness*

Contemporary law enforcement operations targeting the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network have yielded measurable successes, particularly in disrupting its command and control structures. Arrests of key figures, exposure of clandestine cells, and the dismantling of recruitment hubs—such as those documented in Garut and other regions—have significantly weakened NII's operational capacity. These actions have curtailed the network's ability to coordinate activities across provinces and have disrupted its financial and logistical pipelines.

However, the effectiveness of these operations must be assessed beyond immediate tactical gains. While law enforcement has succeeded in fragmenting NII's leadership and impeding its short-term mobilization, the movement's ideological resilience remains largely intact. Mukti & Zakariah (2024) emphasize that NII has historically demonstrated a capacity for regeneration, particularly through internal ideological adaptation and the emergence of new factions. Their study of the 1971–1992 period reveals how puritanical and traditionalist groups within NII splintered and reformed, allowing the movement to persist despite external pressure.

This regenerative ability is rooted in NII's decentralized structure and its emphasis on long-term indoctrination. Van Bruinessen (2002) notes that Islamic radicalism in post-Suharto Indonesia often thrives in environments where state authority is perceived as illegitimate or morally compromised. NII exploits such sentiments, offering an alternative vision of governance rooted in religious purity and divine law. Even when cells are dismantled, the ideological seeds planted through study groups, online forums, and personal networks continue to grow, often reemerging in new forms or under different banners.

Moreover, the legal and operational focus on arrest and prosecution may inadvertently neglect the deeper sociocultural dynamics that sustain NII's appeal. Without robust counter-radicalization programs, community engagement, and ideological alternatives, law enforcement efforts risk becoming reactive rather than preventive. The persistence of NII ideology among youth, students, and even civil servants suggests that enforcement alone cannot extinguish the movement's influence.

In sum, while law enforcement has made commendable strides in disrupting NII's infrastructure, its long-term effectiveness depends on a broader strategy—one that integrates legal action with ideological counter-narratives, community resilience, and sustained educational reform. Only by addressing the root causes of radicalization can Indonesia hope to neutralize the enduring threat posed by NII.

## Challenges and Criticisms

Despite these tactical successes, law enforcement strategies against the NII face significant challenges and have drawn criticism related to both legality and ethics. A primary concern is the potential for overreach and violations of due process during arrests and investigations. While Indonesia's anti-terrorism laws have been revised to include human rights safeguards, groups such as Human Rights Watch have voiced concerns over arbitrary detentions and the use of excessive force by security forces, particularly in the context of counter-terrorism operations (Hassan, 2025).

Furthermore, a purely enforcement-based approach has been criticized for failing to address the root causes of radicalization. Critics argue that while law enforcement can disrupt physical networks, it cannot fully counter the ideological appeal that draws individuals to the NII (Usmita, 2015). The NII's focus on non-violent recruitment through religious and social means requires a more "soft" approach that includes comprehensive deradicalization and disengagement programs.

### *Legal and Ethical Concerns*

While Indonesian law enforcement has made strides in countering the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network, its methods have not escaped criticism—particularly regarding legality, ethics, and human rights. The covert nature of NII's activities, which often blur the line between religious expression and political subversion, has led to complex legal dilemmas. In some cases, the state's response has raised concerns about due process, profiling, and the potential for overreach.

One of the primary criticisms centers on the ambiguity of legal thresholds used to justify surveillance and arrest. Because NII's tactics are largely non-violent and ideologically framed, law enforcement often relies on indirect indicators—such as participation in religious study groups or expressions of dissent against the state—to initiate investigations. This approach risks conflating devout religious practice with extremism, potentially infringing on constitutionally protected freedoms of religion and association.

Sahasrad et al. (2019) warn of the dangers of Islamo-fascism and the state's tendency to respond to ideological threats with sweeping measures that may lack nuance. They argue that "the state's securitization of Islamic movements can lead to the erosion of civil liberties, especially when ideological dissent is treated as criminality". Such securitization, if unchecked, can foster mistrust between Muslim communities and the state, undermining efforts to build resilience against radicalization.

Another ethical concern involves the treatment of suspects during detention and interrogation. Reports of prolonged detention without trial, limited access to legal counsel, and coercive interrogation techniques have surfaced in some NII-related cases. These practices, while often justified under national security imperatives, challenge Indonesia's commitments to human rights and the rule of law.

Profiling also remains a contentious issue. Individuals from certain regions—such as West Java, where NII historically originated—or those affiliated with conservative religious institutions may be disproportionately targeted. This not only stigmatizes entire communities but also risks alienating potential allies in the fight against extremism.

To address these concerns, legal scholars and civil society organizations have called for clearer guidelines on what constitutes ideological extremism, stronger oversight of intelligence operations, and enhanced training for law enforcement personnel in rights-based approaches. Ensuring that counter-NII strategies remain within the bounds of

legality and ethics is not merely a procedural necessity—it is essential for maintaining democratic legitimacy and public trust.

### *The 'Soft' Approach*

While law enforcement remains a critical component in countering the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network, it is increasingly evident that a purely punitive strategy is insufficient to address the movement's ideological depth and regenerative capacity. NII's appeal lies not in its operational strength but in its ability to offer a compelling alternative narrative—one that promises religious purity, moral governance, and a sense of belonging to those disillusioned with the secular state. To effectively counter this, Indonesia must complement its security measures with a “soft” approach rooted in deradicalization, community engagement, and ideological counter-narratives.

Usmita (2015) argues that disengagement strategies are essential for addressing the psychological and social dimensions of radicalization. These include counseling programs, religious re-education, and vocational training aimed at reintegrating former NII members into society. Such efforts not only reduce the likelihood of recidivism but also challenge the ideological foundations that sustain extremist beliefs. Importantly, these programs must be tailored to the specific motivations and backgrounds of individuals, recognizing that radicalization is rarely a one-size-fits-all phenomenon.

Community engagement is another vital pillar of the soft approach. By involving local religious leaders, educators, and civil society organizations, the state can foster environments that are resilient to extremist infiltration. Azra (2006) emphasizes the importance of promoting a pluralistic and democratic interpretation of Islam—one that aligns with Indonesia's national identity and constitutional values. He notes that “*Islam di Indonesia memiliki tradisi moderat yang dapat menjadi benteng terhadap radikalisme*” (“Islam in Indonesia has a moderate tradition that can serve as a bulwark against radicalism,” p. 112). Leveraging this tradition through public discourse, media campaigns, and educational curricula can help counter the exclusivist narratives propagated by NII.

Ideological counter-narratives are particularly crucial in the digital age, where NII and similar groups exploit online platforms to spread their doctrine. The state must invest in producing and disseminating content that challenges extremist interpretations of Islamic texts, highlights the historical failures of radical movements, and showcases the compatibility of Islam with democratic governance. These narratives should be delivered by credible voices—religious scholars, former radicals, and community leaders—who can engage audiences with authenticity and authority.

Ultimately, the soft approach is not a substitute for law enforcement but a necessary complement. It addresses the root causes of radicalization, builds societal resilience, and promotes a vision of Islam that is inclusive, peaceful, and aligned with Indonesia's pluralistic values. Without this holistic strategy, efforts to dismantle NII's infrastructure may succeed temporarily, but the ideology will continue to find fertile ground among the disaffected and disenfranchised.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

In conclusion, countering the unique and persistent threat of the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network requires a multi-faceted and adaptive strategy from Indonesian law enforcement. The evolution of the NII from a conventional armed insurgency to a clandestine, socially-infiltrating movement has necessitated a shift away from a purely

military response towards a more intelligence-driven, police-led approach. This new strategy, supported by a flexible legal framework that combines anti-terrorism laws with other criminal codes, has yielded tactical successes in disrupting cells and preventing major attacks. However, these successes are often limited to the operational level and have not fully addressed the NII's enduring ideological appeal.

The critical assessment of law enforcement strategies reveals significant challenges and areas for improvement. Concerns over due process and human rights, as well as the potential for overreach, underscore the need for greater accountability and legal reform. Most importantly, the limitations of an enforcement-only approach highlight a critical gap between disrupting physical networks and countering the root causes of radicalization. The NII's ability to regenerate and recruit new members through non-violent means demonstrates that a long-term solution must integrate a "soft" approach focused on deradicalization and social reintegration. Moving forward, a more comprehensive response must involve not only the continued application of intelligence-based law enforcement but also a robust, well-resourced, and critically evaluated set of programs designed to address the ideological factors that continue to fuel the NII's regeneration.

### Summary of Findings

This article has explored the complex and enduring threat posed by the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network, tracing its evolution from a territorial rebellion under Kartosuwiryo to a decentralized ideological movement focused on societal infiltration. Unlike conventional terrorist organizations, NII operates through non-violent means—recruitment, indoctrination, and the establishment of parallel governance structures—making it difficult to counter using traditional counter-terrorism frameworks.

Legal responses have included the use of Indonesia's anti-terrorism laws, criminal code provisions on fraud and subversion, and civil service regulations. However, these instruments often struggle to capture the ideological and covert nature of NII's activities, revealing significant gaps in legal clarity and enforcement consistency.

Operationally, law enforcement has shifted from military crackdowns to intelligence-based policing, employing human intelligence, digital surveillance, and community-based monitoring. While these efforts have disrupted NII's command and control structures, they have not fully prevented its ideological regeneration or long-term appeal.

Critically, the article highlights the importance of balancing security with legality and ethics. Concerns over due process, profiling, and human rights violations underscore the need for law enforcement strategies that are both effective and rights-respecting.

Finally, the analysis affirms that countering NII requires a multifaceted and adaptive approach—one that integrates legal enforcement with soft strategies such as deradicalization, community engagement, and ideological counter-narratives. Only through this holistic framework can Indonesia hope to neutralize the NII threat while preserving its democratic and pluralistic foundations.

### Recommendations for Improvement

To effectively counter the persistent and adaptive threat posed by the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network, Indonesian law enforcement must move beyond reactive measures and embrace a proactive, integrated strategy. The following recommendations aim to strengthen the state's capacity to address both the operational and ideological dimensions of NII:

1. **Strengthen Intelligence Capabilities** Law enforcement agencies should invest in advanced intelligence tools, including artificial intelligence and behavioral analytics, to detect patterns of radicalization and covert recruitment. Enhancing digital surveillance—while respecting privacy rights—can help track NII’s online activities, encrypted communications, and financial flows. Training personnel in cultural and religious literacy will also improve the accuracy and sensitivity of intelligence operations.
2. **Improve Inter-Agency Coordination** Effective counter-NII efforts require seamless collaboration between national and regional agencies, including BIN, Densus 88, BNPT, and local police. Establishing joint task forces, shared databases, and standardized protocols can reduce duplication and improve response times. Coordination with civil society and religious institutions should also be formalized to ensure community-based intelligence is integrated into national strategies.
3. **Expand Legal Definitions and Frameworks** Indonesia’s legal system must evolve to address non-violent ideological threats. This includes refining definitions of subversion, unlawful association, and ideological extremism to ensure clarity and prevent misuse. Legal reforms should be accompanied by judicial training and oversight mechanisms to safeguard due process and human rights.
4. **Prioritize Prevention and Counter-Narratives** Law enforcement should work alongside educators, religious scholars, and media professionals to develop compelling counter-narratives that challenge NII’s ideological appeal. Promoting moderate interpretations of Islam, highlighting the historical failures of radical movements, and showcasing inclusive national values can help inoculate communities against extremist propaganda.
5. **Invest in Deradicalization and Rehabilitation Programs** aimed at disengaging former NII members must be expanded and diversified. These should include psychological counseling, religious re-education, vocational training, and community reintegration support. Tailoring interventions to individual needs and backgrounds will enhance their effectiveness and reduce the risk of recidivism.
6. **Monitor and Evaluate Strategy Outcomes** Finally, law enforcement agencies should implement robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of their strategies. Regular audits, public reporting, and academic partnerships can ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

By adopting these recommendations, Indonesia can build a more resilient and rights-respecting approach to countering NII—one that addresses not only the symptoms of extremism but its underlying causes.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

All authors contributed significantly to this research and writing process. Elidar Sari conceived and formulated the main research problem, designed the overall methodology, supervised the study, and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. Al Chaidar developed the theoretical and conceptual framework, provided critical insights on the historical and ideological background of NII, and contributed to revising the manuscript. Arif Rahman conducted the literature review, collected and analyzed secondary data, and examined the legal framework and counter-terrorism legislation. Muammar participated in the thematic analysis of case studies, contributed to the discussion on operational strategies, and assisted in interpreting the research findings. Tri Widya Kurniasari organized the references, refined the language and structure, ensured formatting consistency according to journal guidelines, and contributed to the final revision. All



authors discussed the results, reviewed the manuscript critically, and approved the final version for publication.

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