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Muslims of the Dutch East Indies and the Caliphate Question

The abolition of Abdulmejid's caliphate by Turkey's National Assembly in March 1924 and the call by Azhar `ulama for an international congress in Cairo to elect a new khalifa in the following year had the effect of making Muslims in the Dutch Indies more aware of their living under infidel rule. These events, and the conquest of the Hijaz by Ibn Sa`ud during the same years, briefly caused feverish activity in the Indies. The Dutch Indies government's interim advisor for native affairs, R.A. Kern, even spoke of "a milestone in the Muhammadan movement in this country."[\[1\]](#) For a few years these issues kept Indonesian Muslim leaders occupied and caused splits in the ranks; then suddenly the caliphate issue dropped from the agenda, never to reappear.

Indonesian Muslims and the caliph before 1920

The caliph had never really meant much to Indonesian Muslims. Until the late 19th century he remained a distant and almost mythical authority, whose name and function were mentioned in every Friday sermon as the sovereign of all Muslims but whose existence only rarely impinged upon the real, everyday world.[\[2\]](#) In the seventeenth century, many Indonesians apparently confused the caliph and the Grand Sharif, who was the de facto ruler of Mecca. Towards the middle of that century, the rulers of Banten and Mataram (in west and central Java, respectively) and of Makassar (in south Celebes) sent envoys to Mecca to request from the "caliph-sharif" recognition of their rule and the Muslim title of sultan. The Grand Sharif did not further enlighten them but gave them the requested titles and new, royal Muslim names (Djajadiningrat 1913:49-52, 66-7, 174-7).

The caliph in Istanbul was primarily known to the Indonesians as the Ottoman sultan – the Sultan of Rum or *Raja Rum* as he is called in Malay literature and in popular lore. Aceh, the westernmost kingdom of the Archipelago, established diplomatic contacts with the Ottoman government in Istanbul as early as the 16th century and even appears to have made a formal act of submission to the sultan,

requesting military support in its wars against the Portuguese (Reid 1969). Apart from an abortive mission by an Ottoman fleet, which apparently never reached the East Indies, nothing much ever came of these contacts. In popular belief, however, especially in Sumatra, the sultan of Rum lived on as a benevolent and powerful ruler, who might eventually come to the rescue of his co-religionists in the Indies. In the 19th century, Dutch officials from time to time make mention of rumours among the indigenous population that the sultan would dispatch a fleet to expel the Dutch from the Indies and bring them under Muslim rule again (Gobée 1924:517).

In the 1870s, the Achehnese, locked in a long and bloody war with the Dutch, appealed to the Ottoman sultan Abdulaziz for military support, reminding him of their formal submission to his ancestor. Their envoy, the cultivated Hadrami Arab Abdurrahman al-Zahir, was given a courteous reception in Istanbul but the sultan, who obviously was not interested in distant military adventures, refused to commit himself. Al-Zahir had to return to Aceh empty-handed - apart from a decoration for himself and a polite letter from the Grand Vizier to the sultan of Aceh (Reid 1972; Schmidt 1992:57-66).

The pan-Islamic propaganda of Sultan Abdulhamid II had a distinct, though modest, impact on the Muslim communities of the Indies. This was no doubt in part because his reign coincided with the establishment of effective Dutch colonial rule over much of the Archipelago. The very existence of a strong Muslim state headed by the sultan-caliph served as a reminder that there were alternatives to infidel rule, however hypothetical. Again one gets the impression that the Indonesians saw Abdulhamid primarily as the ruler of the last remaining strong Muslim state rather than as the caliph of all believers.

The chief vehicles of Abdulhamid's pan-Islamic propaganda in the East Indies were the Ottoman consuls in Singapore and Batavia, and to a much lesser extent the Indonesian *hajis*, returning to the Indies after performing the pilgrimage, in some cases followed by a long residence in Mecca. The consuls may have had a symbolic importance in Indonesian eyes, being Muslims but classified as Europeans in the Dutch Indies - the highest status in this three-tiered society, where "foreign orientals" (i.e. Chinese and Arabs) and "natives" filled the middle and lower ranks. Their status ambiguity brought out the arbitrariness of the Dutch Indies social order and gave a hint of possible alternatives. In fact, they came close to subverting this order by giving Ottoman passports to individual Arabs allegedly born in the European parts of the empire, who then on the basis of their Ottoman citizenship demanded European status too.^[3] The only practical aspect of these consuls' pan-Islamic activities, incidentally, appears to have

been their collecting funds for the Hijaz railway (Gobée 1924:517; Schmidt 1992:89). There are no indications that they attempted to foment Muslim uprisings against colonial rule, or even were in contact with anti-Dutch circles.

By the end of the 19th century there was a sizable community of resident Southeast Asians in Mecca, collectively known as the the Jâwah. Dutch Indies officials were highly suspicious of the hajis, many of whom they considered as anti-government agitators. Occasionally there were reports of a returning pilgrim bringing an Ottoman flag with him and proclaiming nominal allegiance to the sultan-caliph. Snouck Hurgronje's personal observations in Mecca in 1885 had shown that the holy city was certainly not the hotbed of anti-colonial conspiracies for which some Dutch administrators took it. He remarked however that the Meccans, local and foreign residents alike, were acutely aware of the advance of European imperialism and its growing domination of the Muslim world as well as of the resistance movements it engendered.

Snouck Hurgronje, the Dutch oracle on Islam, reasoned that it was the caliphate rather than the hajis that constituted the real political threat to Dutch rule. He repeatedly warned his fellow Europeans against the common mistake of considering the caliphate as a sort of Muslim papacy, a spiritual leadership without political implications, and against recognition of the sultan's position as caliph, which would undermine European authority over their Muslim subjects, who would always look for protection by the caliph. He further demonstrated that the claims of the Ottoman sultans to the title of caliph were, historically as well as from the point of view of Muslim legal theory, unsound (e.g. Snouck Hurgronje 1901). He may have impressed his contemporaries by his display of scholarship, but the common Muslim was not affected; for him the Ottoman sultan *was* the caliph, although that did not imply that he felt bound to follow the sultan's orders.

The real test case of the sultan-caliph's influence came with the First World War and the proclamation of *jihad* by sultan-caliph Mehmed Reshad in 1914. The Netherlands were neutral and therefore not directly involved, but the proclamation understandably caused some concern among Dutch administrators. At least one Arabic pamphlet issuing from Istanbul called upon all colonized peoples, including the Indonesians, to rise up against their infidel overlords.^[4] There are no indications that this call fell upon willing ears; to my knowledge no acts of Muslim resistance against the colonial government took place during the war years.

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the Allied occupation of Istanbul nevertheless came as a shock to many Indonesian Muslims. It was felt that the victors not only treated Turkey unduly harshly but in acting against the caliph were interfering with the entire Muslim world. A meeting of the reformist Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, in mid-1920, protested the conditions imposed by the treaty of Sèvres, which were perceived to be a British ploy to finish off Islam and the caliphate. A resolution was moved to ask the Dutch government to pass this protest on the Allied powers.^[5]

The war did have another, indirect, impact on the Muslims in the Indies through the events in the Hijaz. In 1915 for the first time there were no Indonesian pilgrims reaching Mecca, for the British and Dutch shipping lines avoided Jeddah because of war risks. Earlier that year the Dutch government had sent five steamers to Jeddah to repatriate most of the Indonesian residents of Mecca, whose economic situation had become precarious due to shortages caused by the war. Snouck Hurgronje, by then back in the Netherlands, wrote in a reversal of his earlier advice that the government better prevent its Indonesian subjects from travelling to the Hijaz while the war lasted - not only to save them from danger but also because their impressionable minds might be adversely affected by witnessing the Turks' humiliating treatment of such previously respected foreigners as the British and the French (Snouck Hurgronje 1915). Until 1919, it remained practically impossible for Indonesians to go on the hajj. As a result, the numbers of Indonesian pilgrims in the early 1920s, when the route was open again, were higher than ever before.^[6] This, and the fact that the early twenties were also years of great ferment and mobilization among the Indies Muslims, made the caliphate question suddenly – and only temporarily – an important issue in the Indies.

Muslim organization and mobilization in the Indies

The first significant organizations of indigenous Muslims were established in 1912. That year the reformist educational organization Muhammadiyah was established in Yogyakarta, the capital of an indigenous principality in central Java. The same year the more political *Sarekat Islam* was founded in Surakarta (Solo), the capital of the neighbouring principality. Both initially restricted their activities to the island of Java (where about half of Indonesia's population lives). Smaller reformist educational associations emerged in west Sumatra in the following years.^[7]

Muhammadiyah was radically reformist; it opposed numerous traditional Muslim practices with an appeal to Qur'an and *hadith*, and

it replaced traditional Muslim education with European-type schools, which had classrooms, a modern curriculum, and school uniforms. Its radical rejection of such cherished traditional practices as sacrificial meals (*selamatan*), visits of holy graves (*ziarah kubur*), or recitations of magically powerful texts at life cycle ceremonies, and its defence of the principle of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith*) as against following one of the four traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhhab*) repeatedly caused clashes with traditionalist Muslims.

Muhammadiyah was not the first indigenous organization to set up modern schools. It had been preceded in this respect by the *Djamiat Chair* (al-Jam`iyya al-Khairiyya), established in Batavia in 1905 by Arabs but open to non-Arab Muslims as well. Indonesia's Arab community originated mostly from Hadramaut, and was as rigidly stratified as in the mother country, the *sayyid* families jealously guarding their position at the top of the social pyramid. The founders and leaders of the Djamiat Chair were sayyid, but their members and teaching staff included indigenous Indonesians and non-sayyid Arabs. The most learned of the teachers, in fact, was the Sudanese Ahmad Surkatti, who had studied in Mecca but was well acquainted with the reformist ideas then issuing from Egypt. After a clash with the sayyids, Surkatti left the Djamiat Chair, followed by the majority of its members, and in 1913 established the explicitly reformist organization *Al-Irshad*. Al-Irshad branches and schools were established wherever there were sizable Arab communities. The organization never became so large as Muhammadiyah, but Surkatti arguably was the most influential reformist thinker in Indonesia.[\[8\]](#)

The *Sarekat Islam* or S.I. (which had been preceded by a few local organizations of Muslim traders, Sarekat Dagang Islam) was initially a mutual aid association of Muslim entrepreneurs, directed specifically against their stronger Chinese competitors. In a few years time, however, it became the first indigenous nationalist mass organization, drawing support from all segments of the Muslim population. In the process, leadership passed from the Solonese *batik* trader Samanhudi to the charismatic east Javanese aristocrat, Tjokroaminoto, and to the west Sumatran, Haji Agus Salim. The mobilization of the peasantry and small townspeople by the Sarekat Islam acquired millenarian dimensions, Tjokroaminoto was welcomed at mass rallies as a miracle-working messiah.

The rapid growth of the Sarekat Islam at the grass roots resulted in the emergence of a strong left wing within the movement, more radical than Tjokroaminoto and Salim. This left wing had its strongest basis in the north coast city of Semarang, one of the few

cities with a real proletariat. The local S.I. leaders simultaneously were active in what was to become the Communist Party of the Indies (PKI). They succeeded in drawing the entire organization somewhat to the left, and in having the struggle against "sinful capitalism" enshrined in the organization's 1917 program. When these Muslim communists began agitating against Muslim capitalists just as much as against non-Muslim ones, and when later yet they began to emphasize internationalism and criticized the nationalism of the other S.I. leaders, conflicts within the organization could no longer be contained. In 1921, the Semarang leaders were forced to resign from the Sarekat Islam, and Agus Salim and Tjokroaminoto attempted to impose stricter party discipline. This caused a split in the ranks of the Sarekat Islam: some branches remained dominated by pro-communist elements and henceforth called themselves "Red S.I.", while the non-communist branches became known as the "White S.I."

By 1922 the ("White") Sarekat Islam was much weakened by these internal conflicts as well as problems with the government. It had not only lost its left-wing supporters, but the preceding years of left radicalism had also cost it the support of the prosperous Arab business community. The organization, moreover, could no longer claim to be the vanguard of the national movement as it had been in the preceding decade. It was another organization, the National Indies Party, that organized the first All-Indies Congress in 1922. After their flirt with the left and with nationalism, Tjokroaminoto and Haji Agus Salim in the 1920s re-emphasized Islam and Islamic unity as the foundation and aims of the organization. Their interpretation of Islam, it should be added, was a populist and anticolonial one, and Islamic unity to them meant not only unity of the Indies Muslims but solidarity with the struggle of Muslims elsewhere as well. It was this attitude that made them responsive to the caliphate question.

The Indies All Islam Congresses and the caliphate question

Taking their cue from the nationalist All Indies Congress earlier that year, the Sarekat Islam leaders invited representatives of all Muslim organizations to the first *Kongres Al-Islam Hindia* (Indies All Islam Congress), held in Cirebon from 31 October to 2 November 1922. The Sarekat Islam itself, Muhammadiyah and Al-Irshad were the major organizations taking part. Traditionalist Muslims, who were as yet unorganized, were represented by a number of individually invited `ulama, notably Haji Abdul Wahab Chasbullah of Surabaya and Kiai Asnawi of Kudus.^[9] Altogether nine of these All Islam Congresses were to be held, at irregular intervals, the last one in 1932.

The period of the All Islam Congresses thus coincided with that of the abolition of the caliphate and the search for alternatives. Muhammadiyah had, as we have seen above, shown concern at the defeat of the sultan-caliph and at the peace conditions imposed on Turkey by Britain. Mustafa Kemal's resistance movement enjoyed widespread sympathy among newspaper-reading Indonesian Muslims, and by declaring war upon this movement sultan Wahiduddin in many Indonesian eyes clearly disqualified himself as the caliph. The first All Islam Congress, at the instigation of Haji Agus Salim, sent Mustafa Kemal a telegram to congratulate him on his victories (Blumberger 1931:77). When a few weeks later the last sultan fled the country and the National Assembly appointed the prince Abdulmejid to a "spiritual" caliphate without worldly powers, the enthusiasm for the kemalists did not diminish. At the next S.I. conference, in Madiun in February 1923, Salim had a resolution passed in approval of Ankara's intervention in the caliphate and had another felicitation telegram sent. [10] The politicized Muslims of the Sarekat Islam clearly had stronger sympathies for the Turkish nationalists, who had successfully fought for the independence of their country, than for the sultan-caliph, who had collaborated with the British. These sympathies were to last during the following years, even after Mustafa Kemal had carried through his first secularizing reforms.

Besides this brief discussion of the situation in Turkey, the first All Islam Congress was dominated by discussions on religious questions, giving rise to hard clashes between the reformists, notably Ahmad Surkatti, and the traditionalists. The latter accused the reformists of fostering revolution in Islam, of subverting the *madhhab*, and of arrogating themselves the authority to interpret the Qur'an and *hadith* as they liked. The reformists on the other hand asserted that the backwardness of the Muslim world was due to the traditionalists' rigid adherence to medieval texts (Blumberger 1931:95). A compromise of sorts was achieved in the end with a formula that acknowledged both *ijtihad* and the *madhhab*, but the congress failed to "unite the hearts of the traditionalists ... and the reformists" (Noer 1973:227-8).

The second All Islam Congress was held in Garut in May 1924 - that is, just over two months after the abolition of the caliphate by Turkey's National Assembly and Sharif Husain's proclamation of himself as caliph. In his opening speech, Haji Agus Salim placed these events in the context of the struggle between the Muslim world and the colonial powers.

"[He] pointed out how bad the relations between [such Muslim countries as] Turkey, Egypt, the Yemen and the Hijaz were. [Muslim] unity has been broken, and the Caliph only

lives on in the Friday prayers. Everywhere alien powers are in control. In Ankara the Caliph has been deposed, not because Ankara no longer recognizes Islam but because people there, like we here, have to accept what has been predestined. Neither the new caliph Husain, not any new caliph in Istanbul can be ours [...]; only the caliph of the entire Muslim world can be ours. The All Islam Congress seeks unity, and therefore it is its duty to seek a solution to the caliphate question..."[11]

In a later session, Salim returned to the international situation. In the first centuries of Islam, he said, a congress like this would not have been necessary. But in the present age, almost all Muslim peoples lived in subjection, with the exception of Afghanistan and Ankara. Clearly, the existence of an independent Muslim government and popular assembly in Ankara was, to Haji Agus Salim and Indonesian Muslims like him, a much more important fact than the abolition of a powerless caliphate.[12]

The "Red" Sarekat Islam, not surprisingly, cared even less for the deposed Ottoman caliph. The group of Muslim communists around Haji Misbach of Solo[13] had been the first to respond to the events of March. An article in the 15 April 1924 issue of their journal *Medan Moeslimin* told its readers not to get involved in what was, after all, a matter that concerned only Turkey itself. The caliphate, with its pan-Islamism, has only caused the Muslims great losses. In spite of the caliph's collaboration with German capital, his *jihad* had been a dismal failure. It is an illusion to expect the caliphate to bring the Muslims unity, happiness and freedom; only communism will do that (summarized in Gobée 1924:539-40).

Sharif Husain meanwhile attempted to get support for his caliphate from the Indonesian Muslims. In fact, a fair number of Indonesian pilgrims had been present in Mecca during the ceremonies at which he had himself appointed caliph, but they apparently were not much impressed.[14] He had also included two Indonesian Muslims in the advisory council that he immediately installed.[15] Few Indonesians appear to have taken his claims seriously. An official Dutch report on the question mentions that only a few instances were known where the name of the Sharif Husain was mentioned in the Friday sermon, and there too only a few times.[16] The third All Islam Congress would respond even more negatively than the second had done, and call him an imperialist puppet. The only circles in the Dutch Indies where the Sharif appears to have found some sympathy were those of his distant relatives, the sayyids.[17] Deliar Noer (1973:299) reports that the Djamiat Chair reproached Al-Irshad for not responding strongly to

Husain's call, and he suggests that the rivalry between Sharif Husain and Ibn Sa`ud may have exacerbated the conflicts between reformist and traditionalist Muslims in Indonesia.

The caliphate committee

Around the middle of 1924, several Arab personalities and Arab associations in Batavia and Surabaya received invitations to the caliphate congress in Cairo, sent them by the `ulama of al-Azhar. Some of the recipients approached Tjokroaminoto and proposed to send a delegation. His initial reaction appears to have been hesitant; at the S.I. congress in August he no more than mentioned the invitation, although a large number of Arabs had come especially to speak about this matter. Then on 4 and 5 October, leaders of the Sarekat Islam, Muhammadiyah and Al-Irshad called a special meeting in Surabaya to discuss whether a delegation should be sent and what positions it should adopt. Besides national and local leaders of these organizations, numerous locally influential religious teachers, Arabs as well as Javanese, attended the meeting.

Tjokroaminoto set the tone of the meeting with an emotional speech on the need for Muslims to have a caliph, whom he explicitly called the worldly as well as spiritual head of all Muslims. To the Muslims of the Indies, who live under another government, he continued, the caliphate is for the time being only directly relevant in religious matters. The fact that at present non-Muslims can decide in conflicts over religious matters clearly shows how much the caliphate is needed.^[18] Indonesian Muslims, he concluded his speech, loudly cheered by the meeting, should therefore take an active role on behalf of the caliphate.

All agreed about the importance of the coming caliphate conference, but several persons thought the costs of sending an Indonesian delegation to Cairo would be too high. They suggested sending the conference a written message in the name of Indonesian Muslims, or asking Indonesian students in Cairo to represent their nation. A British Indian added that the Arabs would consider an Indonesian delegation as no more than flies anyway, so that a delegation was useless. These objections were overruled by the vast majority, who clearly thought that it was time for the Indonesian Muslims to let their voice be heard. The Muhammadiyah leader from Yogyakarta, Haji Fakhruddin, most explicitly gave voice to a new self-confidence of Indonesian Muslims: even if it is true that the Egyptians look down upon our people as flies, he cried out, let them know what those flies look like. Islam makes no distinction between races, we are

not inferior to Egyptians!

Haji Fakhruddin emerged at this meeting as a more thoughtful leader than the practical politician Tjokroaminoto, and his words several times swayed the discussion.^[19] While Tjokroaminoto and others wished to take decisions on the delegation to Cairo at once, Fakhruddin proposed setting up a caliphate committee to take care of this and other international Muslim affairs. The Dutch official to whom we owe these observations of the Surabaya meeting commented that Fakhruddin apparently had something like the British Indian caliphate committee in mind. Fakhruddin apparently wanted the Indonesian Muslims to play a more active role in the great issues confronting the world of Islam, and at the same time strengthen the Indonesian Muslim community by establishing closer ties with fellow believers elsewhere. It is not clear how much and how directly men like Tjokroaminoto and Fakhruddin knew about the British Indian caliphate movement. The first occasion where we see it held up as an example to the Indonesians was in Haji Agus Salim's address at the fourth All Islam congress, in August 1925.

It was perhaps characteristic of the attitude of many Indonesians towards the developments in Turkey that the standing committee of the All Islam Congress, elected earlier that year, sent a letter to the Surabaya meeting requesting it to nominate Mustafa Kemal as the new caliph! The proposal received serious discussion. Tjokroaminoto affirmed that he approved of Turkey's attitude but thought it was too early to judge what the aims of Mustafa Kemal's secularization were. The issue was resolved by Haji Fakhruddin, who received general support for his judicious opinion that the caliph should have his seat in Mecca, because that city belongs to all Muslims and is independent of non-Muslim powers. A caliph based in Turkey or Egypt would be inclined to give priority to the interests of his own country rather than the common interests of all believers.

The chief outcome of the meeting was the establishment of a caliphate committee (Centraal Comité Chilafat), consisting of Surabaya-based persons of various backgrounds - comprising, notably, traditionalists as well as reformists.^[20] Further debate on the delegation, and the election of delegates were postponed to an extraordinary All Islam Congress to be organized soon by the caliphate committee.

The extraordinary All Islam Congress gathered on 24-26 December 1924 in Surabaya. It was attended by some 600 people from all over Java, with a small delegation from Southeast Borneo as the only outer

islanders present. The caliphate committee, which had prepared the congress, asked Tjokroaminoto and Haji Agus Salim to preside. In his opening speech Salim discussed the recent developments in the Hijaz, hailing Ibn Sa`ud's conquest of Mecca. The Sharif Husain, he said, had never done more than rob pilgrims of their money, and Ibn Sa`ud wished the holy land to be brought under control of all Muslims. As was to become clearer during the following year, in his enthusiasm about Ibn Sa`ud, Salim sowed the seeds of discord in the Congress, for traditionalist Muslims saw many of their religious beliefs and practices under threat from Wahhabis ruling in Mecca.

The congress at once agreed to send two, or, if enough money could be found, three persons to the Cairo conference, and elected as its delegates Muhammadiyah leader Haji Fakhruddin, Sarekat Islam and trade union leader Soerjopranoto, and Haji Abdul Wahab Chasbullah (who was the most vocal of the traditionalists). The financial problems could not so easily be solved. A defunct action committee, the *Tentara Nabi Muhammad*,[\[21\]](#) which had some years before received generous support from wealthy Arabs, put its remaining funds of 3100 guilders at the disposal of the caliphate committee; Al-Irshad added another 500 guilders, but the other participants of the congress collected no more than 444 guilders among themselves.

The most important result of the congress concerned the recommendation that the delegates were to take to the Cairo congress. This text had been prepared by the caliphate committee, and was, after some discussion, adopted by the congress without significant changes. It entailed a proposal for a *modernized caliphate, representative and elected*. The major elements of the proposal were as follows:

1. There should be a caliphate council (*majlis khilâfa*), led by a president called caliph.
2. Members of the council will be: representatives of the Muslims of all countries, for a duration to be established by the council.
3. It has yet to be decided whether the competences of the council towards the Muslim world community will cover worldly as well as spiritual affairs or only the latter.
4. The president of the caliphate council (the caliph) will be elected by the members.

5. The caliphate council should be established on independent Muslim soil, i.e., in Mecca.

6. The costs of the caliphate council will be jointly borne by all Muslims, and will be divided among the various countries in accordance with their capacity.[\[22\]](#)

It has not been documented what inspired the concept of the caliphate council: was it Kawakibi's *Umm al-qurâ*, which some Indonesians may have read when it was serialized in *Al-Manâr*? Was it Sharif Husain's still-born *majlis shûrâ al-khilâfa*, with a few democratic modifications? Were there meanwhile more intensive contacts with the British Indian khilafat movement than the available documents suggest?

This extraordinary All Islam Congress showed the Indonesian Muslims at their most united and their most self-confident. As the Dutch official observer reported, "the congress was more than a discussion of the caliphate [...] It was above all a demonstration for Islam as a political power."[\[23\]](#)

It must have been a great disappointment to many that not long after the congress, news came from Cairo that for internal political reasons the caliphate conference had to be postponed for at least a year. That conveniently also postponed the financial problems associated with the delegation, but it also threw the Indonesians' plans for action off course. Early in 1925, Ibn Sa`ud announced his intention to organize a Muslim world congress in Mecca, which appeared to present the Indonesians with the dilemma of choosing between two rival congresses.

The next Kongres Al-Islam, the fourth, convened in Yogyakarta in the last week of August 1925, jointly with the 12th national Sarekat Islam congress.[\[24\]](#) This congress again showed that Indonesian Muslims had begun taking a more lively interest in developments in other parts of the Muslim world. There was not only a long discussion of the political situation in the Hijaz, but also a special session on Morocco, in which the question was raised what Indonesian Muslims could do to help the Rifian leader `Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi. (The answer to that question was, not by sending money or arms, but by having all Indonesian Muslims simultaneously perform a sunnah prayer to ask God for his victory).

Frictions that had remained underground at the extraordinary congress came to the surface here. One of the points on the agenda was

the reformists' programme of *tanzîm*, i.e. reform of social, economic and cultural life in accordance with Islamic principles.^[25] Those principles themselves were a matter of intense disagreement between the reformists and the traditionalists, and because of the protests of the few traditionalists present the matter had to be shelved. The traditionalists' defensive attitude may have been reinforced by Haji Agus Salim's great enthusiasm for Ibn Sa`ud. The Sarekat Islam leader spoke again at length on the Najdi warrior's merits for the world of Islam and called the war still raging in the Hijaz a struggle between the noble and the vile - the latter being Sharif Husain's son Amir Ali, who was still holding on to Jeddah. The traditionalists at the congress probably objected just as much to the politics of the Sharifian family, but they were more than a little anxious about Ibn Sa`ud's intentions.^[26]

Haji Abdul Wahab, the traditionalist spokesman, proposed to the congress to send its delegates to Mecca to see Ibn Sa`ud after the Cairo congress, in order to plead for tolerance of the *madhhab* and traditionalist practices under his rule. The response to his proposals must have disappointed him; most reformists were unwilling to come to the defense of religious practices that they themselves opposed. The traditionalists felt that the All Islam Congresses lost their usefulness if in matters of essential importance to them they were left in the cold by the others. It was this experience, and the alarming messages reaching them from Mecca, that provided the impetus for them to organize themselves in a separate organization.

Haji Abdul Wahab gathered traditionalist `ulama of Central and East Java in a *Komite Hijaz*, to discuss the situation in the Hijaz and the strategy to be followed to plead the interests of traditionalist Islam with Ibn Sa`ud. They wished to send their own delegation to Mecca, but clearly could not do this in the name of the All Islam Congress. At a meeting in Surabaya in January 1926, the Hijaz committee decided to reconstitute itself as a permanent organization, choosing the name of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (abbreviated NU). They elected Kiai Asnawi of Kudus (who also had represented traditionalists in the All Islam Congress) and Kiai Bisri Sjansuri of Jombang as their delegates. They never departed because of logistical problems; only two years later, Haji Abdul Wahab himself, with the Surabaya-based Egyptian teacher Ahmad al-Ghana'im, travelled to Mecca and had an audience with Ibn Sa`ud.^[27]

This appears to have marked the parting of the ways of reformists and traditionalists - the next partial reconciliation did not take place until the late 1930s. The fifth All Islam Congress, which

convened in Bandung in February 1926 under the auspices of the caliphate committee, was not attended by the members of NU;[\[28\]](#) nor were the following congresses.

The fact that Ibn Sa`ud had meanwhile proclaimed himself king, and thereby had pre-empted plans for a Mecca-based caliphate, did not appear to have lessened the Indonesian reformists' enthusiasm for him. The congress elected a new delegation, consisting of Tjokroaminoto himself and Muhammadiyah's Mas Mansur. They would attend at least the Mecca congress, and perhaps the Cairo one as well. However, Tjokroaminoto mentioned rumours on machinations to have the Cairo congress elect King Fu'ad as the caliph, and he would not take part in legitimating that imperialist stooge (Kramer 1986:95-6). In the end, the delegation only took part in the Mecca congress; the proposals for an elective caliphate were shelved, and we do not find them mentioned anymore.

The Cairo conference nevertheless was also attended by two Indonesians, two well-known reformists from West Sumatra, Abdul Karim Amrullah and Abdullah Ahmad. The reformists in this part of Indonesia were more influenced by `Abduh and Rashid Rida than their Javanese counterparts, and they travelled to Cairo because the initial invitation appeared to come from Rashid Rida (who meanwhile was no longer involved).[\[29\]](#)

The Mecca congress was attended by four other Indonesians besides the All Islam delegation (see the list of participants in Schulze 1990:82). Two of them were Indonesian residents of Mecca: the traditionalist `âlim Muhammad Baqir (originally from Yogyakarta) and the West Sumatran reformist Jenan Tayyib, who led an Indonesian school in Mecca. The other two, `Umar Naji and Muhammad ibn Talib, represented Al-Irshad, the reformist organization of Indonesian Arabs. Unlike the British Indians, the Indonesians did not impress the other attendants, and did not once speak up (the only ebullient personality among them, Tjokroaminoto, did not know Arabic).[\[30\]](#) They were themselves much impressed, however, by this first Indonesian participation in international Muslim politics. On their return to Java they presented a detailed report on the conference to the sixth All Islam Congress, which convened especially for this occasion. It was decided to rename the Congress as the East Indies branch of the Islamic World Conference (*Mu`tamar al-`Âlam al-Islâmî – far` al-Hindiyya al-Sharqiyya*) (Blumberger 1931:88; Amelz 1952:173).

The following year, Haji Agus Salim travelled to Mecca to take part in the second Muslim World Congress - the one that never took

place (cf. Kramer 1986:119-22). He was told the delegates from other countries already had left when he arrived. Attempting to salvage something of the congress spirit, he approached a number of influential persons, including Ibn Sa`ud himself, and received their consent for the establishment of an international association to be called *Jam`iyya Ansâr al-Haramain*. They left the drafting of a program and statutes to the S.I. – showing that they did not take the idea seriously anyway. Back home, Salim received praise for his initiative, but after a single announcement nothing more was heard of the *Jam`iyya* (Noer 1973:137).

Postscript

The Indonesian All Islam Congress survived the Mecca-based conference by a few years, but it was also rapidly falling apart. Conflicts between the Sarekat Islam and Muhammadiyah became more frequent, and by the end of the decade, the All Islam Congress was exclusively a Sarekat Islam affair. In 1929, the Sarekat Islam gave up its pan-Islamism in favour of Indonesian nationalism. Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, on the other hand, turned their attention to more strictly religious, educational and social concerns. At the next large international convention, the General Islamic Congress in Jerusalem in 1931, the Muslims of the Indies were only represented by a 23-year old student then studying in Cairo, Kahar Muzakkir.[\[31\]](#) Neither the congress itself nor pan-Islamic ideals received much attention in the Dutch East Indies any more. The first brief chapter of Islamic internationalism was closed.

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[1] Covering letter of the "Verslag van het Buitengewoon Al-Islam Kongres gehouden te Soerabaja op 14, 25, 26 December 1924." Royal Institute of

Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV), Leiden, western manuscripts, R.A. Kern collection, H 797 no. 337.

[2] I have been unable to discover since when the caliph's name has been mentioned in Indonesian *khutba*. As long as there were indigenous Muslim rulers, one would expect their names to be mentioned, perhaps along with that of the caliph. It was presumably where the Dutch had established their direct rule that preachers mentioned the caliph only.

[3] See Snouck Hurgronje's counsels on this issue to the Dutch Indies government in his *Ambtelijke Adviezen* (vol II, 1522-95, 1615-87). Cf. Schmidt 1992:85-90.

[4] This tract, integrally translated in Snouck Hurgronje 1917, surveys the situation of the Muslim lands held in subjection or threatened by infidels, explains the nature and modalities of *jihad*, and argues that the situation is favourable for a massive uprising against the colonial powers. The Muslims of India, Jawa (the Dutch Indies), Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Caucasia, Khiwa, Bukhara, Turkistan and Iran are exhorted to expel their infidel rulers and free themselves from slavery. A half year after this pamphlet was printed, the Ottoman government issued a "correction" (also translated in Snouck Hurgronje 1917), to the effect that the Netherlands were a friendly nation and that therefore the mentioning of the Dutch Indies in this connection was unwarranted.

[5] Koning 1920. The resolution was not followed up, nor were there any other protest actions.

[6] See the statistics in Vredenburg 1962:143-4.

[7] The standard work on the various Muslim reformist movements in Indonesia is Noer 1973. Blumberger 1931, the first chapters of Benda 1958, and Pijper 1977 are also essential.

[8] The causes of the split in the Djamiat Chair are discussed in Noer 1973:58-69; the best published account of Surkatti's ideas and activities is to be found in Pijper 1977.

[9] A few years later, these `ulama and a number of associates were to establish the first association of traditionalist Muslims, *Nahdlatul Ulama*, presently Indonesia's largest grassroots organization.

[10] "Verslag van het buitengewoon Al Islam Kongres gehouden te Soerabaja op 24, 25, 26 December 1924". R.A. Kern collection, KITLV, Leiden, H 797 no. 337.

[11] "Verslag van het 2e Al-Islam-Hindia Kongres gehouden te Garoet van 19-21 Mei 1924" (by E. Gobée). R.A. Kern collection, KITLV, Leiden, H 797 no. 314.

[12] In another article on the caliphate published at this time, Snouck Hurgronje showed a remarkable insight in the mindset of the Indonesian Muslim opinion leaders. After reiterating his earlier reasoning that the concept of a "spiritual" caliphate does not exist in Islam, he rejected the claims of all would-be caliphs out of hand because they had no political power. He predicted that Muslims in the European colonies would look towards the National Assembly in Ankara as the closest thing to a caliph, because it was the most significant independent Muslim power (Snouck Hurgronje 1924:447-8). In fact, that same year some Indonesians were to propose Mustafa Kemal as the new caliph! (see below).

[13] On the remarkable Haji Misbach and his environment, see the fascinating study by Takashi Shiraishi (1990).

[14] "Kalifaatsaktie." Letter from the interim advisor on native affairs (R.A. Kern) to the governor general of the Dutch Indies, dated 23 October 1924. R.A. Kern collection, KITLV, Leiden, H 797 no. 316.

[15] Immediately after having himself proclaimed caliph, Husain established a *majlis shûrâ al-khilâfa*, consisting of 34 members of various nationalities, "elected" by Meccan and Medinan `ulama and notables. These included two "Jâwa", probably residents of Mecca (Kramer 1986:83-4; their names are not mentioned).

[16] "Kalifaatsaktie", letter quoted above.

[17] A Dutch intelligence report on the Sarekat Islam written in 1922 already noticed that the sayyids in the Indies were, for reasons of expediency, going along with British pan-Arab policies and therefore were opposed to the Sarekat Islam's caliphate activities. *Overzicht van de gestie der Centraal Sarekat Islam in het jaar 1921 (Geheim, voor den dienst)* (Landsdrukkerij, Weltevreden, 1922), p. 3.

[18] Tjokroaminoto's speech is summarized in Kern's letter on "Kalifaatsaktie". Kern commented that Tjokroaminoto's complaint of non-Muslims intervening in religious matters probably referred to the recent requests by several associations in Bandung for government intervention in marriage legislation.

[19] Haji Agus Salim, usually the most convincing orator, was not present at this meeting.

[20] The board of this committee consisted of R. Wondosoedirdjo (later known as Wondoamiseno, a local Sarekat Islam leader) as the president, Haji Abdul Wahab Chasbullah (traditionalist, chairman of the religious association Tasjwirul Afkar) as vice-president, A.M. Sangadji (a Moluccan, member of the central board of the Sarekat Islam) and R. Simun (member of the central board of the Sarekat Islam) as first and second secretaries, and Shaikh Usman Ba-

Abud al-Amudi (treasurer of Al-Irshad) as treasurer. The members of the committee were Sayyid al-Aidarus al-Masjhur (editor of an Arab weekly), Haji Mas Mansur (chairman of Muhammadiyah's Surabaya branch), Shaikh Mansur Yamani (teacher at an Arab school), Saleh Surati (a British Indian merchant), and six less prominent Javanese private persons, Haji Hasan Gipo, Haji Nurkasan, Haji Abdullah Hakim, Haji Abdul Manan, Haji Brahim and Urip. These names are listed in the appendix to the letter "Kalifaatsaktie" referred to in the preceding notes.

[21] The *Tentara Nabi Muhammad* ("Army of the Prophet Muhammad") was established in 1918 in response to an article in a Javanese nationalist magazine insulting the Prophet (see Noer 1973:127-8, Blumberger 1931:76).

[22] "Verslag van het Buitengewoon Al-Islam-Kongres gehouden te Soerabaja op 24, 25, 26 December 1924", R.A. Kern collection, KITLV, Leiden, H 797 no. 337. The discussions at the congress are also summarized in Blumberger 1931:84-5.

[23] R.A. Kern, quoted in Kwantes 1978:322.

[24] "Verslag van het XIIe S.I. kongres en vierde al-Islam kongres, gehouden te Jogjakarta van 21 tot 27 Augustus 1925" (by R.A. Kern), R.A. Kern collection, KITLV, Leiden, H 797 no. 340. Excerpts published in Kwantes 1978:321-7. See also Amelz 1952:166-70 and Anam 1985:50-1.

[25] The proposals for *tanzîm*, incidentally, appear to have originated with the Sarekat Islam, in line with the ideas Tjokroaminoto had recently formulated in his *Islam dan Socialisme*, rather than with Muhammadiyah, which saw reform as a more strictly religious affair (cf. Amelz 1952:166).

[26] The traditionalists had already received reports that Ibn Sa`ud's men had destroyed the tombs of holy graves, and banned the recitation of litanies much beloved to the traditionalists, such as Jazuli's *Dalâ'il al-khairât* (Noer 1973:223-4).

[27] On the birth of *Nahdlatul Ulama*: Noer 1973:222-34; Anam 1985:33-56; van Bruinessen, forthcoming. Ibn Sa`ud diplomatically told Wahab and Ghana'im that Muslims were free to carry out their religious practices except those for which there is no scriptural basis (Noer 1973:223-4).

[28] According to NU sources, Haji Abdul Wahab, who was vice president of the caliphate committee and a candidate delegate to Cairo, did in fact wish to attend the fifth All Islam congress but was prevented from doing so because his father was dying (Anam 1985:52).

[29] Abdul Karim Amrullah's son, the well-known `âlim and author Hamka, describes his father's disappointment at the Cairo conference in his *Ayahku* ("My father").

[30] See Shaikh Zawahiri's disdainful comments on the Indonesians, in Kramer 1986:109-10.

[31] Kahar Muzakkir's name appears on the list of participants in Schulze 1990:99, but although Muzakkir later became a well-known personality, his visit to the Jerusalem congress is not mentioned in the standard works by Benda (1958) and Noer (1973), nor even in his biography (Nakamura 1977).