

https://jakartaglobe.id/context/police-name-former-laskar-jihad-leader-a-suspect-in-religiously-charged-assault-case-in-papua/?utm_source=NL-Morning&utm_medium=2019-03-03



The Jayapura chapter of the Indonesian Ulema Council has raised concern over the past three years that the actions of firebrand cleric Ja'far Umar Thalib and his followers could harm the delicate religious harmony in Papua. (Antara Photo/Gusti Tanati)

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Jakarta. Police have named firebrand cleric Ja'far Umar Thalib, former commander of the disbanded Islamist militant organization Laskar Jihad, a suspect in a case of assault in

Jayapura, Papua.

Ja'far, who is at the forefront of spreading a puritanical form of Islam in Indonesia, has a long history of involvement in sectarian conflict.

According to media reports, the Jayapura chapter of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) had raised concern over the past three years that the actions of Ja'far and his followers could harm the delicate religious harmony in Indonesia's easternmost province.

On Wednesday, these concerns materialized. Police said Ja'far – who runs the Ihya As-Sunnah Islamic boarding school in Keerom district, 30 kilometers south of Jayapura – allegedly incited his followers to attack the house of Jayapura resident Henock Niki.

Niki was reportedly confronted at around 5:30 a.m. by several sword-wielding people dressed in white. The pretext for the alleged attack was that he played his music too loud and that it disrupted the morning prayers at a nearby mosque.

"The perpetrators then severed the cables of the victim's speakers. They told him that the loud music was disturbing worshipers in the mosque," National Police spokesman Brig. Gen. Dedi Prasetyo told reporters in Jakarta on Friday.

However, according to Dedi, the homeowner told his alleged attackers that the morning prayer was at 4:15 a.m., which should have been over by that time. They subsequently fled south in a minibus.

The incident sparked tension among Jayapura residents on Wednesday but police were quick to diffuse the situation before it could escalate. They named seven suspects in the case on Thursday, including Ja'far, who, unlike his co-accused, was not detained over health concerns.

Ja'far is a former student of the Islamic and Arabic College of Indonesia (Lipia), a Saudi-backed

university in Jakarta that teaches Salafism, a revivalist movement that demands that its followers return to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and the early generations of Muslims, which it considers the purest form of Islam.

He continued his studies in Yemen, which further strengthened his hardline views. In 2001, Ja'far led Laskar Jihad to help defend Muslims in Ambon during a violent sectarian conflict on the islands. He disbanded the group after the conflict over concerns that politicians may use it for their own gain.

He later established the Ahi Sunnah Wal Jama'ah Communication Forum (FKASWJ) to ensure that Laskar Jihad's former members remain in touch.

However, Ja'far has been involved in many disputes with Salafists participating in Indonesian politics, according to a report by NU Online, the publication wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, the country's largest Islamic organization.

Ja'far moved to Keerom in 2015, following the Tolikara incident, during which a mosque was burnt down in the Papuan town. He allegedly launched a jihad, or holy war, against the perceived enemies of Islam in Papua following the incident, while insisting that his continued presence in the province and the building of Islamic schools there were solely for preaching Islam.