

Terrorism in Perspective: An Assessment of 'Jihad Project' Trends in Indonesia

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SUMMARY The face of extremism in Indonesia has changed dramatically over the past decade. While the security threat from Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and other Salafi-Jihadist groups remains, it has diminished significantly from its heyday in the early 2000s. With many hardline leaders now in prison or dead and current mainstream leaders reluctant to support terror attacks, violence as a means to establish an Islamic state appears to be losing favor in militant circles. New followers continue to be radicalized through a number of channels, but there are also former radicals who are disengaging as they grow disillusioned with movement tactics and leadership, as they develop new relationships, and as their priorities shift. The organized, large-scale bombings have declined, largely in response to a changing security environment. Small-scale attacks and targeted assassinations are still prevalent, but these are often the actions of small splinter groups or unaffiliated individuals. Within JI itself, support for terror attacks on Indonesian soil is increasingly a minority-held view.

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The “jihad project” in Indonesia has been losing ground over the past decade. The major jihadist groups, most notably Jemaah Islamiyah, have been decimated by arrests and deaths. The increasing effectiveness of the Indonesian police, the widespread public revulsion at terror attacks, and the imprisonment or death of the key masterminds of major terror attacks such as the Australian Embassy bombing, the first and second Bali bombings, and the 2009 Marriott and Ritz-Carlton bombings have highlighted the costs of continued bombing actions. While Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) had always been divided between those who favored the use of terror tactics and those who believed that violence was permissible only in conflict areas (for example: Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War, or Ambon or Poso during their respective communal conflicts), the consequences of bombings exacerbated these tensions.

Among those who still favor utilizing terror tactics, the current tendency is to eschew major attacks on Western targets in favor of local (such as police, mosques, and churches) and targeted assassinations. Interestingly, many of those individuals lack affiliations with any of the major jihadist groups. Perhaps most interesting, many JI members have become disillusioned by indiscriminate bombings, shortsighted and weak leaders, and reckless new members that lack the robust indoctrination of JI members from years past. As a result, particularly among JI members, some are revisiting their own role and the extent of their own involvement in the movement, going inactive, or moving on from the movement altogether.

The Major Jihadist Groups in Indonesia

Jemaah Islamiya (JI). Jemaah Islamiyah is a clandestine Salafi-Jihadist movement that arose in 1993 as a breakaway faction of Darul Islam (DI). “Salafi-Jihadist” refers to those groups that combine the textual literalism of Salafi Islam with the belief that violent jihad is the best way to achieve one’s goals. “Darul Islam” (DI) is the umbrella term used to refer to several regional Islamic rebellions that fought against the Indonesian army in the 1950s before being crushed in the early 1960s.¹ During Suharto’s

New Order regime, Darul Islam remained an underground movement.

Following the split between JI and DI in 1993, JI would go on to become “the largest and most sophisticated terrorist network in Southeast Asia and also the region’s only genuinely transnational jihadist movement.”² At its height, JI encompassed Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Southern Philippines, and even had a small presence in Australia. It had a clearly defined hierarchical structure set out in its 1996 General Struggle Guidelines of Jemaah Islamiyah, a regional command system, and a strong organizational culture with clearly defined administrative rules and funding channels. JI has envisioned itself as a more puritanical, militant, and disciplined alternative to DI.³ However, its historical links to DI cannot be ignored as many JI members come from DI families.

Ring Banten. It is important to note that JI is not the only violent breakaway faction of Darul Islam. The DI movement is quite factionalized, with both violent and non-violent splinters. The other notable violent splinter faction is Ring Banten. Ring Banten has been a source of recruits for several bombing operations, including the Christmas Eve church bombings in 2000, the 2002 Bali bombing, and the Australian Embassy bombing in 2004.

KOMPAK. The Komite Aksi Penanggulangan Akibat Krisis (KOMPAK), or Crisis Management/Prevention Committee, is a violent faction of an Islamist charity bearing the same name. It has partnered with Jemaah Islamiyah members to carry out attacks, particularly in conflict areas during the Maluku and Poso conflicts between 2000 and 2002. Indeed, many JI members went to fight in the Maluku and Poso conflicts through KOMPAK channels, due to frustrations over the slow bureaucratic process of going via JI channels. Close ties remain between members of JI, Ring Banten, and KOMPAK, who trained and fought together in the conflict regions.

Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT). JAT was established in 2008 by Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, the former head of Jemaah Islamiyah, as an above-ground

jihadist group. It focuses on *dakwah* (proselytization among Muslims), participates in demonstrations, publishes a magazine, and does public outreach to spread Salafi-Jihadist ideas. It has a clearly defined organizational structure, maintains regional branch offices down to the district and cell levels in areas where it has taken root, and has a paramilitary wing that conducts training exercises.⁴ It has drawn members not only from other Salafi-Jihadist groups like JI, but also above-ground radical Islamist groups like the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), which also counts Ba'asyir as a founding member. Some of the small-scale attacks that occurred in the past year, most notably the bombing of the Cirebon police mosque and the stabbing of a police officer in Bima, were linked to youths who had spent time in JAT study circles or affiliated schools.

The Decline of Salafi-Jihadism in Indonesia

The scope and scale of the October 2002 Bali bombing by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members caused some to hypothesize that Southeast Asia was fast becoming Al Qaeda's "second front." However, JI was neither as committed to the global Salafi-Jihadist ideas and goals nor as united as was initially thought. First, JI's goals centered on the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia, as opposed to a regional or global Salafi-Jihadist agenda. Although the global anti-Western, pro-caliphate Salafi-Jihadist narrative assuredly influenced the attitudes and actions of certain JI members, for many within JI, the local context shaped their understanding of their *raison d'être* more so than the global one. Second, JI was beset by weak leadership and factionalization even between the late 1990s and 2003, a period widely perceived as its heyday due to the ease with which its members could move around, gain access to funds, stockpile weapons, recruit and train new members, expand organizational capacity, and send fighters to join in the communal conflicts in Ambon and Poso—all without disruption from the security services.

However, when Osama Bin Laden issued his October 1998 fatwa that legitimated attacks on civilians and on Western targets, there were serious

disagreements between the globally and locally oriented JI leaders about the suitability of the fatwa to the Indonesian context and whether it should be implemented in Indonesia. Even before the Bali bombings, there was a significant faction within the JI leadership that opposed terror attacks against civilian targets outside of conflict areas such as Ambon and Poso. With JI's *amir* Abu Bakar Ba'asyir refusing to take steps to rein in the more violent elements, hardliner Hambali's faction circumvented the established central leadership and carried out large terrorist operations. This created a precedent for the most radical to go off on their own to carry out terror actions. Following Hambali's arrest in 2003, Noordin M. Top, a Malaysian national who was among the most hard-line JI members, would partner with like-minded members of JI and Ring Banten to launch attacks against Western targets, including the Marriott bombing, the Australian Embassy bombing, and the second Bali bombing in 2005.

By 2004, a split had formed between the pro- and anti-bombing factions within JI. Increasingly, many of JI's leaders were arriving at the conclusion that large-scale bombings were counterproductive for the organization's long-term survival and its ability to win support among the broader Muslim populace for its goals.⁵ Even before the Australian Embassy bombing in 2004, the leaders of the anti-bombing wing had decided that it was permissible for JI members to inform on Noordin M. Top and his counterpart, the master bomb-maker Azhari Husin, if they had information about where either man was staying.⁶ The split between JI and Top and Azhari's group was formalized when Top began calling his group "Al Qaeda in the Malay Archipelago" (a title pointing to his admiration for al Qaeda rather than any direct connection).

JI today is a shadow of its former self. The arrests that occurred following the first Bali bombing in 2002 and the subsequent investigations leading to the arrest, imprisonment, and killing of key JI figures between 2004 and 2010 decimated "structural" JI as well as the more militant "non-structural" faction that had carried out the early bombing attacks. Moreover, Noordin M. Top's splinter faction has ceased to

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be operational following Azhari's death in 2005 and Top's in 2009. "Once an organization that spanned 5 countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines and Australia), JI's administrative structure in late 2007 covered Indonesia only, its al Qaeda links and international funding were largely gone, hundreds of its members were in prison across the region, and many others were cooperating with the police and intelligence, some of them overtly."⁷ Today, there is no longer a structural JI of which to speak. Instead of a hierarchical transnational structure, there are study groups in key cities including Solo, Semarang, Lampung, Jakarta, and Palu, each led by a specific charismatic cleric, as well as some 30 affiliated schools.⁸ This raises the question of what comes next for JI.

According to Abu Rusdan (acting amir of JI following Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's arrest in 2002 and current JI intellectual leader), the way forward lies in reinstating JI's agenda of the 1993-1999 period—the only period, he claims when JI had a duly appointed leader, Abdullah Sungkar. In that early period, JI shifted its focus from the state to society. "The focus of attention was on education and dakwah. We post-poned addressing other agenda items to see first how society responded to our dakwah." This was the era, he says, before JI "elements" engaged in terrorist actions.⁹

JI is in a phase of consolidation, where it is prioritizing the spreading of its message through *dakwah* (Islamic proselytization), *tarbiyah* (education), publishing, and recruiting new followers. However, as its leaders and members assert that the time now is not conducive for the use of violence, it raises the question of how successful recruitment would be. Who would be attracted to join a Salafi-Jihadist group that is discouraging its members from engaging in operations?

Further Splinters of JI: JAT and the Cross-Organizations Initiative. With the decline of JI, Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), established by Abu Bakar

Ba'asyir in 2008, seemed to fast be supplanting it as the largest jihadist organization in Indonesia. This movement differed from JI in several ways. First, it functioned as both an above-ground network of radical *ta'lim* (study groups) that preached the government was the enemy and as a clandestine military wing that participated in paramilitary training exercises.¹⁰ Second, whereas JI's structure had fallen apart, JAT had a clearly defined organizational structure down to the district and cell level. Third, membership was a fairly quick process without the intensive indoctrination and training required of JI members. Fourth, it brought together Ba'asyir loyalists from several radical Islamist movements including MMI and JI.¹¹ Entire branches of JI and MMI have migrated to JAT. Finally, as an above-ground movement, it also sought to make alliances with radical vigilante militias for issues of common interest such as anti-vice initiatives or attacks on the Ahmadiyah religious minority, a heterodox Islamic sect they view as heretical for contending that another prophet followed the prophet Muhammad. Thus, it has appeared to be the kind of dynamic radical organization that could potentially cross boundaries and build coalitions to further the Islamic state agenda.

In 2010, militant members of JAT, together with like-minded members of JI, KOMPAK, Ring Banten, and hardline cleric Aman Abdurrahman (a former JAT member himself), joined in a cross-organizational initiative to establish a secure base in Aceh, an area under their control that would serve as a refuge, a base of operations, and a military training camp. This particular disgruntled subset of JI, JAT, KOMPAK, and Ring Banten members were frustrated both by what they viewed as the "do nothing" approach of JI—which had effectively "abandoned" the jihad cause, at least for the time being—and Noordin M. Top's approach of repeated attacks on large-scale Western targets, which they viewed as lacking in long-term vision. Like Top, they advocated jihad now; however, in their view, this would be a means of applying Islamic law in full. As such, they eschewed Top's strategy of large-scale bombings, which could ignite a backlash due to high Muslim

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casualties, in favor of targeted assassinations of civilian, police, and military officials as well as anyone spreading “secular ideals” in the base area. However, this effort, too, would fail, as their training camp was discovered by local police, and soon after, the police anti-terror team Densus 88 (Detachment 88) and a provincial unit of the police mobile brigade (Brimob) launched an operation to arrest the jihadists, who, after a brief attempt to hold their ground, fled. Within weeks, eight participants were killed and 48 arrested.¹²

The Face of Extremism in Indonesia Today. In 2011 and 2012, the face of violent extremism in Indonesia has been changing yet again. As the leadership of JI and KOMPAK have fragmented and many key figures have been arrested or killed, those individuals who favor utilizing violence are regrouping around a disparate network of mosque-based study circles, inspired by particular radical preachers. Several have been linked to JAT study groups, but others are independent. The targets have also shifted away from costly large-scale bombings to targeted assassinations and small-scale bombings often, but not always, directed at the police. In 2011, “the litany of terrorist incidents ranged from bombs concealed inside of books delivered to several public figures; to a suicide bomber blowing himself up in a mosque within a police compound in Cirebon; a police post in Palu, Central Sulawesi being attacked by gunmen; a 16-year-old *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) student stabbing to death a police officer in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara; and a church in Solo being hit by another suicide bomber.”¹³ The sum total of actions has created an environment of concern in Indonesia, for no one knows when the next attack will happen.

Can we say that extremist violence is on the decline in Indonesia? It depends on the type of violence about which we are speaking. Large-scale terror attacks against Western targets are most certainly on the decline, at least for now. However, these small-scale assassinations and local bombings are still quite prevalent. Thus, while the scale has shrunk, the frequency has increased—but frequency should not be

mistaken for popularity. A 2006 survey conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) indicated that 89 percent of Indonesians do not believe that suicide bombings are justifiable.¹⁴ Moreover, a supra-majority of Indonesians support neither Salafi-Jihadist groups like JI nor hardline anti-vice vigilante militias like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI). The results of a 2007 LSI survey indicated that 91 percent of respondents rejected the struggle of JI; 92 percent did not support the mission of MMI; and 87 percent rejected the struggle of the anti-vice militia, FPI.¹⁵

Pathways to Radicalization

Over the course of 27 interviews conducted by this author, jihadists from Jemaah Islamiyah, KOMPAK, and Ring Banten identified three key pathways that drove their radicalization: the local conflicts in Maluku and Poso between 1999 and 2002; kinship ties; and, less frequently, a search for knowledge about jihad. In addition, scholars on violent radicalism in Indonesia identify the teacher-student discipleship relationship as an important driver and also note how prison study groups can create a fertile environment for radicalization.¹⁶

Local Conflicts. Local communal conflicts have provided unique contexts and motivations for radicalization. In Indonesia, communal conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Poso and Maluku between 1999 and 2002 created a fertile environment for JI, KOMPAK, and the nationalist Salafi paramilitary group Laskar Jihad (the militia wing of the Al Sunna Communication Forum [FKAWJ]) as well as other smaller jihadist groups. In these instances, Muslim youths who had lost family in the fighting sought to avenge the death of loved ones. Even among those who had not lost loved ones, feelings of solidarity with Muslim victims of the conflict emboldened Muslim youths to attack Christian targets.

Radical study circles played a role in this instance as well. For example, in Poso, following the 2000 Walisongo massacre, where a Christian militia attacked

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a Muslim village and Islamic boarding school at Walisongo, radical clerics arrived from Java and set up study circles in local mosques. Youths who knew little about Islam had the opportunity to learn, and the framework they were taught legitimated the desire for revenge they felt. Muslim friends who had not lost relatives were emboldened to also carry out attacks on the “enemy” out of solidarity or loyalty to Muslims. In the aftermath, these networks and this ideology continued to legitimate attacks long after the conflict had drawn to a close.

Kinship Ties. A second important pathway to radicalization in Indonesia, especially within the JI community, is the tradition of what has been referred to as “inherited jihadism,” with fathers and grandfathers providing inspiration for their children and grandchildren and older brothers inspiring younger siblings.¹⁷ Blood ties, marital ties, and extended kinship ties via education have all been factors in the radicalization of Indonesian militants.¹⁸ There are several notable instances of jihadism carrying through familial generations.

For example, Abu Rusdan, one of JI’s intellectual leaders, is the son of a man imprisoned by Suharto in the 1980s for participating in Darul Islam. At the age of 15, his own son was inducted into JI.¹⁹

Farihin Ahmed, a JI operative and Afghan veteran, contends that both his father and grandfather fought in armed jihad against the governments of their time. His father, Ahmed Kandai, a member of Darul Islam, participated in a plot in 1957 to assassinate then President Sukarno.²⁰ His children now attend JI schools.

Another component of inherited jihadism is younger siblings following their elder brothers into JI and KOMPAK. Most famously, Ali Imron and Amrozi followed their brother Muchlas into JI. Each played a key role in the 2002 Bali bombing, with Muchlas and Amrozi being executed in 2008 for their roles in the attack and younger brother Ali Imron currently serving a life sentence at a detention center in Jakarta.²¹ In interviews, Ali Imron explains that even though he personally opposed the Bali bombing, he carried out his duties because

he was following his brother Muchlas.²² Half-brother Ali Fauzi also followed Muchlas into JI but was not involved in the attacks.

Likewise, Farihin Ahmed’s three brothers also followed him into JI and, in two cases, joined him in specific activities: brother Mohammed Islam joined him in Poso during the communal conflict, Abdul Jabar joined him in participating in an attack against the Philippine ambassador, and youngest brother Solahuddin was involved in the Atrium Plaza shopping mall bombing in Jakarta in 2001.²³

The process of radicalization in these families is not, however, a simply passive process of cross-generational indoctrination. Instead, the path can often be more directed and deliberate, with JI members attempting to ensure their children are raised with the proper worldview via enrolling them in JI-affiliated preschool play groups, Koran study groups, Islamic elementary schools, and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren).²⁴ This education model also serves to artificially construct an extended family, whose members, although not bonded by blood, are connected through their common educational experiences and common ideology. In time, some of these youths may come to constitute the next generation of jihadists.

Prison. Prison is often a venue for radicalization. Prison officials have permitted jihadist leaders to hold study circles in prison and, through the medium of the study circle, ordinary criminals and even an occasional prison guard have been recruited. Moreover, in many prisons, the senior hardcore members share cells with the low-ranking “followers” as well as ordinary criminals, which can provide a host of informal interactions through which radicalization can occur. While efforts have been undertaken in some prisons to better train guards and wardens so that they would be better equipped to handle jihadist detainees, challenges still remain. In Petobo prison in Palu, Central Sulawesi, for example, as of 2010, according to local authorities from the counter-terrorism team Densus 88, there was no space to separate the hardcore jihadists from the common criminals; thus, they were mixed together.²⁵

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Seeking Knowledge. Finally, in a handful of cases, the pathway to radicalization began quite innocuously as a search for knowledge about Islam and jihad. This may include a desire to participate in a jihad but as often as not, it begins with curiosity. In two cases, that search initially led youths to join the Justice Party (PK), an Islamist political party inspired by Muslim Brotherhood teachings. However, after the PK transformed into the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in 2003, the party's subsequent moderation of rhetoric, inclusive sloganeering, and de-emphasis on *sharia* alienated these youths who began to search and sample study groups from different movements, growing progressively more hardline as time went on.²⁶ Ultimately, friends invited them to join a radical study circle led by an extremist cleric who not only gave them the answers they sought but also endeavored to provide practical experience.

Mentors and Peers. Key in each of these pathways is the role played by seniors who can indoctrinate the members of their circle in an Islam that is reflective of the Salafi-Jihadist worldview. Moreover, the medium of the study circle creates a reinforcing environment as its members, bound together by ties of friendship, feel pressure to participate, partake of groupthink, adhere to group norms, and obey orders from their seniors within the group, irrespective of personal reservations.

Pathways to Disengagement

In order to understand the changing map of Salafi-Jihadism in Indonesia, it is important for us to understand not only why individual members are joining these movements, but also why they leave. While new followers continue to be radicalized via the pathways described above, many existing members have come to the conclusion that the use of violence is counterproductive to their goals and have disengaged.

Disengagement is the decision by individual members of terrorist groups, radical movements, or gangs to cease participation in acts of violence.²⁷ They may do this in one of three ways: (a) by leaving the extremist group altogether, (b) by remaining in the

group but going inactive, or (c) by remaining in the group but taking on non-violent roles such as transportation or publishing. At the outset, this "disengagement" should be viewed as a gradual process occurring over months and often years. As radicalization is a pathway of incremental decisions, so too is disengagement. It is a process of internal reflection, often involving reading, discussing, debating within oneself and among friends, and making dozens of small incremental choices on the pathway to eventual disengagement.

Over the course of research conducted by this author in 2010 and 2011 interviewing 27 jihadists from JI, KOMPAK, Ring Banten, and Tanah Runtuh (JI's affiliate in Poso, Central Sulawesi), four factors seemed to be driving the disengagement process: disillusionment with tactics and leaders, reevaluation of costs and benefits, new relationships and networks, and changing personal priorities.

Disillusionment. Disillusionment with tactics, strategies, and leaders featured prominently in the decision to disengage for many of those interviewed. Fourteen of those interviewed condemned bombing tactics and nine condemned leaders. Most often, disillusionment centered on the choice of target (e.g., large-scale attacks where Muslims could be killed), the timing of bombing actions (now), and the location (in Indonesia). Interviewees often condemned bombings as counterproductive, with negative implications for JI's mission and members, who now found themselves under increased police scrutiny, as well as not justifiable according to Islamic doctrines.²⁸ Nasir Abas, the former JI commander of the JI training region Mantiqi 3, explains how the bombings sparked his own disillusionment not only with the actions themselves but with leaders and planners, who had a rigorous Islamic education and should have known better:

Why did I stop my activities in this group? Because I believe that JI is broken. I have held this view since 2000. When Hambali launched his bombing attacks, the church bombings, I tried to stay out of it. But then it was uncovered in Malaysia

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and Singapore. It was revealed that JI members entered Indonesia and made a mess. They made a mess again with the Bali bombing in 2002 and as a result, the leadership of JI was caught...The most important factor [in my disengagement] is Islam. They defiled the name of Islam. Because of the bombings, what do people say? What does Islam teach about that? And Muchlas, Imam Samudra, Ali Imron, Mubarak, these people who graduated from Islamic boarding schools, did their teachers teach like that? If so...they defiled the name of teacher and defiled the ethics of jihad. In jihad, there are ethics in war. If someone is not pointing a gun at you, you cannot kill him. It's nonsense if they say they did not intend to kill women and children because the bomb was set in a public place. They defile the name of Islam. They defile the Islamic community. They cause non-Muslims to become suspicious of Muslims.²⁹

New relationships exposed the jihadists to new points of view and to new narratives for perceiving 'the enemy'

Some reserved their dismay specifically for their seniors. The most acerbic condemnations were reserved for Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who was widely viewed as a good cleric, but a weak leader who was too interested in playing politics and, as such, was a poor leader for a clandestine organization.³⁰ One current member of JI, who was involved in a 2000 attack on the Philippine ambassador in Jakarta explains his frustrations with Ba'asyir in the following terms:

I don't follow [Ba'asyir] anymore. He is not a leader. He is purely a preacher. He does not protect us. JI needs two things: a concept and a figure. As a figure, we had expectations of him. But he is not capable. For example, after he replaced Abdullah Sungkar, he suddenly joined the Indonesian Mujahidin [Council] (MMI) and agreed to be its chairman. So how is he going to do that and still lead JI? Then, there was a problem with MMI and he moves on and establishes JAT. What kind of leader is this?³¹

Cost-Benefit Considerations. The sense of disappointment can also be framed in terms of costs and benefits. If Jemaah Islamiyah and its affiliates sought

to convince Indonesian Muslims to support their goal of an Islamic state, they could not afford to alienate them through mass bombings that cost the lives of innocent Muslims. Moreover, since the police had been so effective, their best tacticians were now dead or in prison, their weapons had been confiscated, and their training camps in Mindanao shut down. Those who had risen in their place lacked the discipline, skills, religious knowledge, and loyalty of their predecessors. Thus, at least at this juncture, violence was counterproductive to their overall goal.

New Relationships. The building of new relationships and networks or the reestablishment of old ones with individuals and groups outside the jihadist circle also played a decisive role in the decision to disengage. In interviews, new friendships and networks were mentioned by 13 individuals. These new relationships exposed the particular jihadist to new points of view and to new narratives for perceiving "the enemy." They raised questions that forced jihadists to ponder long-held beliefs, shone a light on the disconnect between rhetoric and reality, refocused priorities away from jihad or revenge killing and toward family, offered new opportunities to expand their horizons, and opened up new networks. Given how important friendships, mentor-student relationships, and kin relations are to the radicalization process, it is perhaps not surprising that the building of new friendships and relationships would be key to disengagement. In several instances new mentors supplanted old ones, and, in a few cases, even pressure from parents reinforced a decision to disengage.

In the case of one jihadist from Tanah Runtu, JI's local affiliate in Poso, conterminously with his involvement in Tanah Runtu, he was also spending time at the office of a local human rights group. When they would hold discussions, he would sit in the back and listen. Over time, they grew to trust him to the extent that when they left the office to travel to other districts, they would leave their keys with him. At the time of the January 2007 raids on the Tanah Runtu compound by Densus 88, he

was on the “most wanted” list for his participation in the shooting of a local prosecutor and thus went into hiding. Interestingly, the people who took on the primary risks of hiding him were not his friends from Tanah Runtuh or JI—they were a female activist from the human rights group and her husband. During the two years he lived in the home of the activist, they had many discussions about the conflict in Poso, about how he could achieve religious goals without violence, and about Muslim-Christian relations. Over time, he came to befriend her activist friends as well. This relationship with the activists influenced his views and resulted in the formation of a new network of friends and ideas that served as a counter-balance to the old ones. In his own words:

I observed she saw the conflict was not between Muslims and Christians. The conflict became protracted and each side took revenge. Sometimes, she gave me inputs. I mingled with the group and gained knowledge from them. We discussed how I could work for religious goals through dakwah (Islamic proselytization) not through violence. They said, “Think about your future. You need to think about your family in Poso.” We had many such discussions.³²

In short, while other factors reinforced his decision to disengage—namely, a lingering remorse over the shooting and pressure from his mother—the key factor in his disengagement trajectory was the new friendships he built within the human rights activist network and the conversations he had with its members, particularly the woman who hid him and her husband.

Changing Priorities. Finally, changing personal and professional priorities also contribute to the decision to disengage, often working to reinforce disillusionment and new relationships. In these instances, the subject’s priorities shifted away from armed struggle and toward education, employment, marriage, and children. One should not underestimate the salience of the pull of family, especially children. As a member

of a clandestine organization, one’s top priority was carrying out their duties within that organization. However, when one disengages, one is able to shift their priority to their children.

According to three of the interviewees, the opportunity to go back to school to finish high school, to go to college, or to obtain an MA is not only an empowering experience, but also can lead to the building of new friendships and relationships. Moreover, new job and educational opportunities that necessitated interaction with and the building of relationships with people outside the jihadist circle offered a clear set of incentives to stay the course; if one returned to conducting terror actions, they would lose all they had built.

A Combined Effect. These factors—disillusionment and cost-benefit considerations, new relationships, and changing priorities—work together in reinforcement loops to push jihadists toward disengaging from violence. Often, one factor may serve as a cognitive opening, making a person more receptive to change, and other factors then build upon the original factor. It is important to note that disengagement is not always linear. Just as one can start on the pathway toward disengagement, there is always the possibility that one would re-engage, under the right circumstances. However, as new relationships are built, as new priorities outweigh old ones, and as disappointment with the consequences of terror attacks takes root, the prospects of reversion become much less likely.

This then raises the question of the role of the Indonesian government and security services in disengagement efforts. Densus 88 often refers to its activities with Indonesian jihadists as its “soft approach.” A widely discussed component of the “soft approach” is one-on-one and group discussions in prisons—sometimes formal, sometimes informal—between jihadists and either Nasir Abas, the former commander of Mantiqi 3 of Jemaah Islamiyah, and Ali Imron, the repentant Bali bomber. These conversations, especially in those prisons like Cipinang and POLDA Metro, where they occurred with some frequency, encouraged

This raises the question of the role of the Indonesian government and security services in disengagement efforts

Among groups that work for an Islamic state, many work through peaceful channels—violent extremists are truly the fringe of a fringe

reflection and rethinking in some instances. One jihadist from Tanah Runtu, JI's Poso affiliate, explained: "Before I met Nasir Abas, I thought he was a traitor, but I realized he had deeper religious and military knowledge than me. He boosted my spirits and reassured me that I had done the right thing by surrendering."³³ Second, seeing Muslim police pray and witnessing Christian police treating Muslims with respect had a positive impact on how two jihadist interviewees perceived the police and, eventually, the state: "I realized that the police could not be un-Islamic. Some Densus 88 members pray and we chat with them. I changed my mind about the police after times of deep reflection."³⁴ Finally and most important, there was an expectation of torture and in instances where an individual was treated humanely by the police it often made an impression.

But the "soft approach" is rarely a decisive factor in the disengagement process because the default method of the police, especially the local police, is torture without kindness. Many jihadists interviewed from Poso to Semarang to Surabaya spoke of being tortured for up to a week.³⁵ Such brutality not only can breed mistrust of the police but it also has the potential to reinforce the idea that the police and, by extension, the state are un-Islamic. It is not surprising that in the recent rash of attacks in 2011 by radical study circle members and freelancers, the police were a common target.

An Evolving Picture

There are several points that can be taken away from this briefing paper. First, we must remember that JI, Ring Banten, KOMPAK and JAT are the latest in a long tradition of violent Islamist movements that would endeavor to establish an Islamic state in

Indonesia. These fringe movements have historically been and will, in all likelihood, continue to be part of the Indonesian radical Islamist fabric along with paramilitary anti-vice militias like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). However, this is but one small sliver of Islamism in Indonesia. Even among those groups that work for an Islamic state, there are many that work through peaceful channels exclusively—through dakwah, education, socialization, and publishing. Thus, violent extremists are truly the fringe of a fringe.

Second, our understanding of JI's strength, its ties to global Salafi-Jihadist movements, and its capacities must be reassessed in light of the collapse of the JI structure. Today, JI is but one of a variety of violent Islamist extremist groups, varying from the large, well-structured organization of JAT, to small freelance groups inspired by the internet, to study circles, teaching seminars, schools, and foundations, some of which are run by JI clerics and others by those associated with a militant faction of Darul Islam. A minority among these groups support terror attacks.

While JI and other Salafi-Jihadist movements should still be considered a security threat by the Indonesian authorities, this threat is diminished significantly from its heyday in the early 2000s. The most hardline JI, KOMPAK, and Ring Banten leaders are either dead or in prison. Mainstream JI leaders and members do not support terror attacks and they advocate a return to the dakwah-centric approach that characterized JI activities in the mid-1990s under the leadership of Abdullah Sungkar, JI's first amir. While new followers continue to be radicalized by family ties, educational socialization, prison experiences, and occasionally, inchoate searches for knowledge, it is clear that the overall trend, at least among JI members, is disengagement from violence.

Notes

- ¹ International Crisis Group, *Indonesian Jihadism: Small Groups, Big Plans*, Asia Report, no. 204 (Jakarta: International Crisis Group, April 19, 2011), 5.
- ² Greg Fealy and Aldo Borgu, *Local Jihad: Radical Islam and Terrorism in Indonesia* (Barton, ACT: Australian Strategic Policy Institute [ASPI], September 2005), 25.
- ³ Fealy and Borgu, *Local Jihad*, 72.
- ⁴ International Crisis Group, *Indonesia: the Dark Side of Jama'ah Ansharut Taubid*, Asia Briefing, no. 107 (Jakarta: International Crisis Group, July 6, 2010), 5.
- ⁵ Fealy and Borgu, *Local Jihad*, 73.
- ⁶ Sidney Jones, "The Changing Face of Terrorism in Indonesia: Weaker, More Diffuse, and Still a Threat," speech at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (September 15, 2005).
- ⁷ Sidney Jones, "Briefing for the New President: The Terrorist Threat in Indonesia and Southeast Asia," in "Terrorism: What the Next President Will Face," ed. Richard A. Clarke, special issue, *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 618 (July 2008): 2.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 2; e-mail correspondence with Sidney Jones.
- ⁹ Ken Ward, "Indonesian Terrorism: From Jihad to Dakwah?" in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008), 214.
- ¹⁰ International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: From Vigilantism to Terrorism in Cirebon," *Asia Briefing*, no. 132 (Jakarta: International Crisis Group, January 26, 2012), 9.
- ¹¹ International Crisis Group, *Indonesia: The Dark Side of Jama'ah Ansharut Taubid*, 5; 3–4.
- ¹² International Crisis Group, *Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*, Asia Report, no. 189 (Jakarta: International Crisis Group, April 20, 2010), 7; ii; 7; 12; i.
- ¹³ Sulastri Osman, *Freelance Fighters and "Do it Yourself" Terrorism: What Lies Ahead for Indonesia*, RSIS Commentaries, no. 11 (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies [RSIS], January 13, 2012), 1.
- ¹⁴ Reuters, "Indonesian Terror Survey 'wake-up call,'" *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 16, 2006.
- ¹⁵ "Trend Orientasi Nilai-Nilai Politik Islamis vs. Nilai-Nilai Politik Sekuler dan Kekuatan Islam Politik," *Lembaga Survei Indonesia*, October 2007.
- ¹⁶ For discussion of the teacher-disciple relationship, see Sulastri Osman, "Jemaah Islamiyah: Of Kin and Kind," RSIS Working Papers (Singapore: RSIS, March 22, 2010), ii; for more on prison study groups, see Jones, "Briefing for the New President," 6–7.
- ¹⁷ Sidney Jones, "Inherited Jihadism: Like Father, Like Son," *Australian Financial Review*, July 4, 2007.
- ¹⁸ Osman, "Jemaah Islamiyah," 1.
- ¹⁹ Jones, "Inherited Jihadism."
- ²⁰ Osman, "Jemaah Islamiyah," 9.
- ²¹ *Ibid*
- ²² Ali Imron, interview by author, Jakarta police headquarters, Jakarta, Indonesia, July 2011.
- ²³ *Ibid*.
- ²⁴ Jones, "Inherited Jihadism."
- ²⁵ Interview with local Detachment 88 head, Palu, Central Sulawesi, July 2010.
- ²⁶ Interviews conducted in Jakarta and Semarang with former jihadists. June 2011.
- ²⁷ John Horgan, "Individual Disengagement: A Psychological Analysis," in *Leaving Terrorism Behind*, ed. Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan (London: Routledge, 2009), 20.
- ²⁸ Interviews with JI and KOMPAK members, June 2010 and July 2011, Jakarta, Indonesia.
- ²⁹ Nasir Abas (former commander of Mantiqi 3, Jemaah Islamiyah), interview by author, Jakarta, Indonesia, June 2011.
- ³⁰ Interviews with JI and KOMPAK members, June 2010 and July 2011, Jakarta, Indonesia.
- ³¹ Interview with member of Jemaah Islamiyah, Jakarta, Indonesia, July 2010.
- ³² Interview with operative from Tanah Runtuh (JI's Poso affiliate), Palu, Indonesia, July 2010 and June 2011.
- ³³ *Ibid*.
- ³⁴ Interview with member of Tanah Runtuh (JI's Poso affiliate), Palu, Indonesia, July 2010.
- ³⁵ Interviews conducted in Semarang, Surabaya, Poso, and Palu, July 2010, June 2011, and January 2012.

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