



TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

**ISEAS**  
YUSOF ISHAK  
INSTITUTE

# TERRORISM IN INDONESIA AFTER “ISLAMIC STATE”

Quinton Temby

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# FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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# Terrorism in Indonesia after “Islamic State”

By Quinton Temby

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The emergence of the Islamic State (IS) movement in Indonesia in 2014 re-energized violent extremism in Indonesia. As a result of effective counterterrorism policing, however, IS networks have been decimated and the structure of jihadism in Indonesia has shifted from organizations to autonomous networks and cells, increasingly organized via the Internet.
- Although support for violent extremism in Indonesia remains marginal, cells of IS followers maintain a low-level capacity to conduct lethal attacks against civilian and government targets.
- Most IS operations in Indonesia are sporadic and low-level attacks against the Indonesian police. Religious minorities have also been high-profile targets, as in the Surabaya church suicide bombings of 13 May 2018. There are some indications, however, of militants’ renewed interest in attacking foreign targets, such as tourists on the resort island of Bali.
- IS returnees from the Middle East have begun to play a role in recent attacks. The presence of this population in Indonesia raises the risk of militant capabilities being enhanced above their current relatively low level. Most returnees are women and children, and the increasing involvement of this cohort in IS attacks promises to complicate counterterrorism operations. The rise of pro-IS charities in Indonesia, poised to service returnees and reintegrate them into Indonesia’s jihadist community, further exacerbates this problem.
- The overall threat of terrorism to the Indonesian state and to the stability of the Joko Widodo administration remains low. Surprise attacks by unknown cells, however, have the potential to shock the Indonesian political system, provoking government repression of Islamists and exacerbating political polarization and community tensions.





# Terrorism in Indonesia after “Islamic State”

By Quinton Temby<sup>1</sup>

## HOW ISLAMIC STATE CHANGED TERRORISM IN INDONESIA

The emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) in 2014 saw a variety of Indonesian militant networks pledge allegiance to its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. While the largest Indonesian jihadist group, Jemaah Islamiyah, remained loyal to its traditional allies in Al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra (later Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham), a loose pro-ISIS coalition formed under the banner of Jamaah Anshorul Daulah (JAD). The rapid territorial gains of ISIS in Syria and Iraq greatly energized Indonesian jihadism, attracting radical youth and veteran militants alike. Former JI leader and icon of the old guard, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, surprised observers by shifting allegiance to IS from his prison cell. For a brief window, ISIS activists openly held group oaths of allegiance in prominent mosques and marched with black flags on the streets of Jakarta. Reflecting developments elsewhere in the world, Indonesian pro-ISIS activists carved out corners of the Internet for recruitment and propaganda, some of which they still inhabit to this day.

What the “Islamic State” movement lacked in terms of organizational structure in Indonesia it gained in an ability to surprise authorities with repeated small-to-medium scale attacks. In the ISIS era, the most prominent attacks in Indonesia were a bombing and shooting at a Starbucks and shopping mall in the centre of Jakarta in January 2016,

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multiple family-led suicide bombings of church and police targets in Surabaya in May 2018, and a knife attack on Indonesia's chief security minister, Wiranto, in October 2019. These incidents left over twenty dead and dozens injured. Above all, Indonesian authorities were caught off-guard by the tactical innovation of the attacks.

The primary focus of IS attacks, however, has been the national police (Polri). Militants have been locked in cycles of revenge with police—which they see as the main symbol of a tyrannical un-Islamic regime—overshadowing any motivation to attack Western targets. Following the police, religious minorities, especially Christians, have been the most prominent target, in a national context of increasing political polarization between Islamists and nationalists. This pattern of targeting stands in contrast to the pre-ISIS era, when the emphasis was on attacking the “far enemy”—US and Western targets, such as international hotel chains and embassies. But ISIS militants have made some attempts to hit Western targets and there remains the possibility that the movement could switch priority to such targets in the future.

Due to effective counterterrorism policing, Indonesia has so far avoided a large-scale ISIS attack on a Western or Indonesian government target. But a number of ambitious plots were thwarted by the country's counterterrorism police unit Densus 88 (Special Detachment 88), including an attempted attack on the tourist island of Bali and a plot to bomb the presidential palace. Indeed, while the number of victims of terrorism in Indonesia steadily declined since its peak with the Bali Bombings in 2002, the number of arrests rose dramatically, reaching unprecedented heights over the last two years. From 2018 to late 2019, some 700 individuals have been detained for terrorism offences. In 2018 law enforcement powers were strengthened by a revised anti-terrorism law (Undang-Undang Anti-Terrorisme No. 5/2018), which provides for longer detention periods and criminalizes foreign fighters. But the revised law did little to ease the problem of overcrowding in prisons, where jihadists have in the past radicalized other prisoners, and planned attacks.

The first jihadist group in Indonesia to declare allegiance to IS was Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT; East Indonesia Mujahidin), in 2014 in the former communal conflict area of Poso, Central Sulawesi. Led

by Santoso and comprised of less than a hundred men isolated in the mountains, MIT never achieved its goal of carving out territory in the name of Islamic State, although it came closer than any other group. The defeat of MIT and the killing of Santoso in July 2016 by military and counterterrorism forces was a key success in the fight against terrorism in Indonesia.

The first prominent militant to declare allegiance to IS was imprisoned cleric Aman Abdurrahman. Through his sermons and writings distributed online, he was persuasive in arguing that all civil servants, especially the police, were legitimate targets for attack as they were apostates working for an un-Islamic regime. His ability to influence his followers from prison to join IS illustrated a weakness in Indonesia's approach to terrorist incarceration. While he continues to be influential, Aman has since been effectively isolated from the jihadist community.

Despite their early and ongoing enthusiasm, Indonesian militants have been peripheral to the central IS project. A division of mostly Indonesian and Malaysian fighters in Syria arranged themselves under the name of Katibah Nusantara (Archipelagic Unit), led by Indonesian Bahrun Naim. But the group appears to have been low in the IS hierarchy and marginal to operations in Syria. Back home, although Indonesian militants were implicitly part of Islamic State's East Asia Wilayah and sometimes mentioned in media releases by the group, the region was only formally recognized in 2018. Although distance from Syria and Iraq may diminish the ability of Indonesian militants to leverage IS support for operations, such distance also makes the course of Indonesian jihadism harder to predict.

Although there are no reliable estimates, the number of active violent extremists in Indonesia is likely in the low thousands. Militant activity centres on the most populous island of Java; however jihadist cells have been detected in almost all provinces of Indonesia. If anything, the geographical reach of militants is increasing, with small numbers detected in areas as remote as Papua province.

Transnational linkages serve as an important force multiplier for jihadism in the region, but again the phenomenon is one of a small number of key operatives. Indonesians played an important role in the IS attack on the city of Marawi in the Philippines in May 2017. An Indonesian couple

served as suicide bombers in an attack on a church in Jolo in the Southern Philippines in January 2019, in which twenty-two people were killed. The IS project has helped to unify jihadists in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Transnational jihadist collaboration will continue to present a coordination and intelligence-sharing problem for authorities across the region, with militants buoyed by the impact achieved through cross-border operations such as Marawi.

Despite the IS-inspired revival of jihadism in Indonesia, the country remains predominantly peaceful and its government stable. The presence of large moderate Muslim organizations, such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, provides strong ballast against the mainstreaming or normalizing of religious violence. Although violent extremism does not present an existential threat to Indonesian democracy, complacency would be unwise. Violent extremism is deeply rooted in a fringe of the community and has the potential to aggravate political and religious tensions. Political polarization, especially since the national elections of April 2019, could deepen in response to successful terrorist attacks, contributing to cycles of government repression and militant reaction. The primary threat from violent extremism is thus the role it might play in contributing to illiberal political trends that weaken Indonesian democracy and strain Indonesia's social fabric.

## **THE CURRENT TERRORIST THREAT**

There is currently a high risk of terrorism in Indonesia posed by supporters of IS. The threat is mitigated, however, by ongoing counterterrorism operations that have degraded the capacity of Indonesia's central pro-IS coalition, Jamaah Anshorul Daulah. Pro-IS elements are present across the Indonesian archipelago, in almost all provinces. But without a hierarchy and coherent structure, militants have been reduced to largely autonomous and localized cells and networks, and increasingly rely on Internet communications. While JAD is the most dangerous group at this time, the landscape of jihadism in Indonesia is populated by several main organizations, some in support of Islamic State but others opposed to it or in competition with it.

### *Pro-IS Militants*

1. *Jamaah Anshorul Daulah* (Community of the Helpers of the State; JAD). Formerly led by Indonesia's most influential pro-IS preacher, Aman Abdurrahman, JAD is an umbrella group of pro-Islamic State militants, found mostly on the island of Java in relatively autonomous clusters. JAD members appear to have been responsible for the Jalan Thamrin (Starbucks) bombing in Jakarta of 14 January 2016, the Kampung Malayu attack in Jakarta of 24 May 2017, and the Surabaya attacks of 13 May 2018. Members were also involved in the Marawi siege. The group's formal structure appears to have been decimated by large-scale police arrests following the Surabaya attacks. (Also known as *Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah Islamiyah*; JAKI).
2. *Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid* (Community of the Helpers of Monotheism; JAT). Founded in 2008 by former JI leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, with branches across the country. A large section of the group left in opposition to Ba'asyir's pledge of loyalty to IS, to form *Jamaah Anshorul Syariat* (Community of the Sharia Helpers; JAS).
3. *Mujahidin Indonesia Timor* (Mujahideen of Eastern Indonesia; MIT). Emerging as an Al-Qaeda affiliate in 2012, MIT was the first Indonesian jihadist group to join IS in 2014. In November 2019 they are the first group to pledge allegiance to the new IS caliph, Abu Ibrahim al Hashimi al Qurashi in a video that was circulated on Telegram. Located in the isolated jungles of Poso, Central Sulawesi, and having grown against a backdrop of communal conflict, MIT is often seen as being closest to establishing IS-held territory in Indonesia. Yet since its leader, Santoso (alias Abu Wardah), was killed in 2016 amid intensive military and police operations, the group's presence has dramatically declined.
4. *Ring Banten*. A highly militant Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) splinter group, the ring functions more as a loose network than a structured organization. A Ring Banten leader in prison for his involvement in the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing, Iwan Dharmawan (alias Rois), appears to have had a key role in coordinating recent jihadist activities, including the Thamrin (Starbucks) attack, travel to Marawi, and travel to Syria.

## *Anti-IS militants*

1. *Jemaah Islamiyah* (Islamic Community). With an estimated membership of some 10,000, JI is probably the largest militant Islamist organization in Indonesia, and perhaps the best organized. It was originally a splinter group from the Islamic State of Indonesia (Negara Islam Indonesia, NII), Indonesia's first jihadist movement. Due to its traditional ties to al-Qaeda, JI sided with al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra in the Syrian conflict. Since then, JI has remained ideologically opposed to IS on the basis that its caliphate is at best an overreach and at worst flawed according to Islamic jurisprudence. JI also opposes IS's widespread practice of *takfir* (apostatizing its Muslim rivals and enemies) as unwarranted and counterproductive. In recent years, JI increasingly appears to be focused on the provision of social services and has shown interest in mainstream Islamist political issues. The group is thus a chronic concern rather than an acute threat. On 28 June 2019, JI's relatively unknown leader, Para Wijayanto, was arrested after being on the run since 2003.<sup>2</sup>
2. *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (Mujahidin Council of Indonesia, MMI). Founded by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in 2000, MMI is an above-ground organization which lobbies for the imposition of strict Islamic law in Indonesia. Now led by Afghan veteran Abu Jibriel, and responsible for the Ar-Ramah website, one of the most popular extremist websites in Indonesia.
3. *Jamaah Anshorul Syariat* (Community of the Sharia Helpers; JAS). Led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's sons, JAS members formed their own group after splitting from JAT in rejection of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's 2014 pledge of loyalty to IS. It is a relatively small group aligned to Al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria.

Despite the high risk of further attacks, terrorism does not represent a significant threat to the Indonesian state or to political stability in Indonesia. Yet it does have the capacity to disrupt the political system and

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<sup>2</sup> Raymundas Rikang, "Pandai Besi Setelah Dua Windu", *Tempo*, 13 July 2019, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/158027/pandai-besi-setelah-dua-windu>.

the cohesion of local communities, exacerbating political polarization and contributing to religious tensions. Attack plots continue to occur sporadically, with most plots directed at the Indonesian national police. Attacks are typically conducted with knives or low-grade improvised explosive devices (IEDs), indicating low technical capability and limited access to weapons. Over time, attack methods have transitioned from the high-impact weapons of the first-half of the 2000s to the low-impact weapons of the past four to five years. Consequently, the number of victims of terrorism has significantly declined since its peak at the time of the Bali bombings of 2002.

Despite reduced capability, the disorganized and disconnected cell structure of IS in Indonesia has rendered detection and disruption by the security services more difficult. Indonesian authorities cited this detection problem as a challenge in the wake of the attack on the chief security minister Wiranto. The attack on the senior official appears to have been conducted opportunistically by a couple not closely connected to a larger JAD network.<sup>3</sup>

Two other changes have compounded the unpredictability of the threat. First, the growing operationalization of women is a relatively recent development to which security services must adjust. The counterterrorism implications of strong female actors and families-as-cells in attack plots are yet to be fully understood. Second, the shift to Internet-based activity and the rapid changes in the way such technology is being used is a growing challenge. Social media appears to have accelerated the traditional recruitment-radicalization process. To some extent, encrypted chat on mobile devices is offsetting militants' difficulty in networking face-to-face. In the near future, advances in the quality and methodology of attack instruction materials may serve to raise the threat from highly online militant actors.

Finally, unofficial Indonesian IS messaging on Telegram indicates growing interest in foreign and Western targets. In November, a widely

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<sup>3</sup> Quinton Temby, "Wiranto Attack: What It Says of the Dangers That Indonesia Faces", *Straits Times*, 12 October 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/wiranto-attack-what-it-says-of-the-dangers-that-indonesia-faces>.



circulated Telegram message urged followers to be more ambitious in their attacks: “Choose larger targets not limited to the offices of the police, assistants of the oppressors. But aim for international targets. Just like our brothers did in Jordan when they targeted crusader tourists.”<sup>4</sup> While attacks against foreign targets in Indonesia may be more likely than they were in recent years, it is too early to anticipate a shift to the “far enemy”, although one credible expert has suggested as much.<sup>5</sup>

In the Middle East, IS is focused on rebuilding networks and consolidating the authority of new leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi.<sup>6</sup> While most of its activities are focused on Iraq and Syria, there are indications that IS seeks to boost its credentials with a turn to external enemies. On 27 January 2020, IS spokesman Abu Hamza al-Quraishi issued a recorded statement urging a “new phase” of attacks, targeting Israel. In this new phase the focus should be “fighting the Jews and reclaiming what they have stolen from the Muslims, and this cannot be reclaimed except through fighting.”<sup>7</sup> The audio statement is the first since the death of former leader Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi. It was translated and widely distributed on Indonesian IS chat groups.<sup>8</sup> The speech was also reported on by Indonesian extremist websites.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Strategi Amniyah Bagi Sel Daulah”, Telegram, 14 November 2019.

<sup>5</sup> “Taktik Baru Terorisme: Sel dan Musuh Jauh”, *Tempo*, 13 December 2019, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/159151/taktik-baru-terorisme-sel-dan-musuh-jauh>.

<sup>6</sup> Aaron Zelin, “After Losses, Islamic State Plots Comeback”, Wilson Center, 13 December 2019,

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/after-losses-islamic-state-plots-comeback>.

<sup>7</sup> “IS Vows ‘New Phase’ of Attacks Focused on Israel, in Audio Message”, *Malay Mail*, 27 January 2020, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/world/2020/01/27/is-vows-new-phase-of-attacks-focused-on-israel-in-audio-message/1831982>.

<sup>8</sup> “Pidato Juru Bicara Daulah Islam”, PDF document, February 2020.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, “Jubir IS Serukan Pejuang IS di Sinai & Suriah Untuk Tingkatkan Serangan ke Israel”, *Mata Media*, 29 January 2020, <https://mata-media.net/blog/berita/2020/01/29/jubir-is-serukan-pejuang-is-di-sinai-suriah-untuk-tingkatkan-serangan-ke-israel/>.

## FROM DEEP ORGANIZATIONS TO SHALLOW CELLS

One of the most significant ways in which violent extremism in Indonesia has changed during the IS era is in a shift from militant organizations to autonomous cells. This shift has occurred due to the pressure of increasing police counterterrorism operations that has made face-to-face organizing more difficult. At the same time, social media communications via Internet-enabled cell phones has made virtual organizing easier and faster.

In the first phase of IS in Indonesia circa 2014, membership grew largely from pre-existing jihadist organizations such as NII, MIT, Tauhid wal Jihad, and JAT. In the second phase of IS in Indonesia, from circa 2018 to the present, membership appears to have grown from online recruitment of individuals who have no or limited previous history with jihadist organizations. It is increasingly common for new IS followers to be recruited and radicalized initially online, in an accelerated process that includes taking an oath of allegiance via encrypted chat messaging.<sup>10</sup>

Online recruitment may then be followed by offline organizing in small cells, not necessarily under the umbrella of JAD. In a recent example of this phenomenon, the Sibolga attack participants drew on militants from a large geographical spread who had connected online. They met in person for the first time only to carry out the attack.<sup>11</sup> A recent message circulated on IS Telegram groups in Indonesia argued that the new cell organizational pattern was strong because of groups' separation from one another and autonomy. "We advise that those in new cells stay together in your network, never try to conduct communications with other networks, especially 'old networks'."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Taktik Baru Terorisme: Sel dan Musuh Jauh", *Tempo*, 13 December 2019, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/159151/taktik-baru-terorisme-sel-dan-musuh-jauh>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> "Strategi Amniyah Bagi Sel Daulah", Telegram, 14 November 2019.

It may be the case that mobile-enabled social media networking makes it easier (i.e., faster) to create new cells but the lack of a deeper organizational structure makes it harder to build and sustain jihadist movement activity over time. In the shallow online, cell-based phase of IS activity, therefore, we may see militants favouring short-term strategies that rely on ad hoc attacks of high impact but low organizational sophistication and coordination. Such attacks may nevertheless be technologically sophisticated if militants have access to high-quality online instruction materials.

## RETURNEES AND DEPORTEES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

Following the emergence of IS in 2014, the group urged followers to emigrate to live in the caliphate or, if that were impossible, to seek to topple the infidel government at home.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, in the early years, Indonesia saw a reduction in terrorist activity as militants prioritized travel to Syria. Estimates of the total number of Indonesians that travelled to IS-held territory ranges from 700 to over 1,000.<sup>14</sup> Some of these travelled to fight with al-Qaeda affiliates but the overwhelming majority joined Islamic State.

In contrast to a previous generation that went to Afghanistan in the 1980s to train for the fight back home, foreign fighters from Indonesia sought a life, if not a martyr's death, in Syria and Iraq. A significant proportion of those who went were women and children, reflecting IS's strategy of appealing to families to populate the so-called caliphate.

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<sup>13</sup> Attacks at home were urged from 2015. See "Islamic State Leader Purportedly Urges Muslims to Launch Attacks", *Washington Post*, 14 May 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/islamic-state-leader-purportedly-urges-muslims-to-launch-attacks/2015/05/14/f3947540-fa77-11e4-a47c-e56f4db884ed\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/islamic-state-leader-purportedly-urges-muslims-to-launch-attacks/2015/05/14/f3947540-fa77-11e4-a47c-e56f4db884ed_story.html).

<sup>14</sup> "WNI Simpatisan ISIS di Suriah: 'Kami Minta Bantuan Bisa Pulang'", 25 March 2019, *Tirto.id*, <https://tirto.id/wni-simpatisan-ISIS-di-suriah-kami-minta-bantuan-bisa-pulang-dkb1>; "Indonesia Ready for Returning Islamic State Fighters, Officials Say", *Benar News*, 4 November 2019, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/fighter-returnees-11042019155454.html>.

Early recruitment was driven by IS's sophisticated propaganda machine in tandem with the influence of Indonesia cleric and translator, Aman Abdurrahman. Aman was an early exponent of *takfiri* ideology in Indonesia and a respected translator of the works of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. He would emerge as the central pro-IS ideologue in Indonesia and ultimately be charged with orchestrating a number of key terror attacks executed in the name of IS and JAD.<sup>15</sup>

Current estimates put the remaining number of Indonesia militants and their families detained at over 600.<sup>16</sup> As elsewhere in the world, how to manage Indonesian citizens who joined IS in Syria but seek to return now that the caliphate has fallen is an awkward problem for the Indonesian government. To date, Indonesian government policy on returnees from Syria and deportees (typically from Turkey) has been ad hoc and short-term. IS returnees and deportees are typically processed at the Handayani rehabilitation centre in Jakarta, run by Indonesia's ministry of social affairs.<sup>17</sup> However the process is brief, ranging from thirty to sixty days, after which those processed are expected to reintegrate into society.

The Indonesian government response to IS recruits to Syria has also been marked by a lack of coordination with authorities on the ground in refugee camps. A June 2019 *Tempo* magazine report on Indonesian IS refugees, some 200 of whom were located at the time at Camp al-Hol in northern Syria, found that the Kurdish authorities were willing to cooperate to return the Indonesians but they had had little communication with the Indonesian government. "Our last communication with the Indonesian government was over two years ago", a Kurdish representative at al-Hol

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<sup>15</sup> "Rekam Jejak Aman Abdurrahman, 'Singa Tauhid' ISIS Indonesia", *CNN Indonesia*, 18 May 2018, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20180518104434-12-299177/rekam-jejak-aman-abdurrahman-singa-tauhid-ISIS-indonesia>.

<sup>16</sup> "Indonesia Considers Repatriating More Than 600 Citizens With Alleged Terror Ties", *VOA News*, 22 January 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/indonesia-considers-repatriating-more-600-citizens-alleged-terror-ties>.

<sup>17</sup> Balai Rehabilitasi Sosial Anak Memerlukan Perlindungan Khusus, official website, <https://handayani.kemsos.go.id/>.

said.<sup>18</sup> Aside from lacking resources, Indonesia is in a difficult position diplomatically to address the detainees held by the Kurds. Indonesia's nearest embassy is in the Syrian capital of Damascus, but the mission, hosted by the Syrian government, would have to cross the line in the civil war in order to coordinate with the Kurdish forces fighting Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

It is still too early to assess the full impact of the return of IS followers to Indonesia. A small number of returnees and deportees, however, have already featured in high-profile attacks. The May 2018 church attacks in Surabaya were inspired by a deportee from Turkey, Khalid Abubakar. Khalid left to fight with IS in Syria in 2016, but in January the following year he was deported to Indonesia from Turkey, having failed to reach IS territory.<sup>19</sup> It was then that he led study groups in which the two families that conducted the Surabaya attacks were radicalized. Similarly, Rullie Rian Zeke and Ulfah Handayani Saleh, the husband-and-wife couple that conducted the Jolo church bombing in Sulu in January 2019, were IS recruits who had been deported from Turkey in 2017.<sup>20</sup> A lesser-known example of a returnee committing an attack in Indonesia is that of Syawaluddin Pakpahan, who fought in Syria with the Free Syrian Army. Back home, however, he converted to ISIS and with an accomplice was arrested in an attempt to attack the North Sumatera police headquarters.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Nestapa di Negeri Syam”, *Tempo*, 22 June 2019, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/157863/nestapa-di-negeri-syam>.

<sup>19</sup> Kirsten E. Schulze, “The Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia”, *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 11, issue 6 (June–July 2018), <https://ctc.usma.edu/surabaya-bombings-evolution-jihadi-threat-indonesia>.

<sup>20</sup> “Giliran Militer Filipina Nyatakan Pasangan Indonesia Bomber Gereja Jolo”, *Sindo News*, 24 July 2019, <https://international.sindonews.com/read/1423484/40/giliran-militer-filipina-nyatakan-pasangan-indonesia-bomber-gereja-jolo-1563984906>.

<sup>21</sup> “Di Suriah Syawaluddin Pakpahan Tak Gabung ISIS, tapi Tetap Bertempur”, *Wartakota*, 4 July 2017, <https://wartakota.tribunnews.com/2017/07/04/di-suriah-syawaluddin-pakpahan-tak-gabung-isis-tapi-tetap-bertempur>.

In this context, there is an immediate and near-term risk that returnees may serve to enable terrorist attacks in Indonesia. According to a credible recent assessment, there are some 500 deportees already at large in Indonesia.<sup>22</sup> Aside from representing a highly motivated cohort of militants, returnees may contribute skills and experience gathered from their travel to IS territory which serve to raise the capability of Indonesian militants to conduct attacks above the current low level of capability. A returned militant with organizational skills may be all that is needed to build a dangerous operation out of the disparate cells that characterize the pro-IS movement in Indonesia.

The longer the problem of foreign fighters is left to fester, the greater the risk that they will return to the fold of IS supporters in Indonesia, with those detained overseas eventually finding their own way back home. This risk is further heightened by the growth of pro-IS charitable organizations in Indonesia. Organizations such as the Aseer Cruce Center, based near Jakarta, collect donations through advertising on online platforms such as Instagram and Telegram. They have their own bank account, social media outreach operations, and organizational chat groups. PAKAR, an Indonesian deradicalization NGO, found that there are nine such pro-IS foundations operating in Indonesia, all on the island of Java. In their report on the sector, PAKAR found that the foundations served to keep jihadist families in the fold, facilitate jihadist training, and effectively counter the influence of government counter-radicalization programmes.<sup>23</sup> The main function of such groups is to provide financial support and social services, such as schooling and healthcare, to orphaned children and the families of imprisoned terrorists. A recent report found that some of the organizations may also be involved in forms of physical training in preparation for attacks, commonly referred to as *I'dad*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Taktik Baru Terorisme: Sel dan Musuh Jauh”, *Tempo*, 13 December 2019, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/159151/taktik-baru-terorisme-sel-dan-musuh-jauh>.

<sup>23</sup> “9 Lembaga Amal Di Indonesia Pendukung Terorisme”, Redaksi PAKAR, 26 January 2020, <https://www.radicalismstudies.org/656/2020/01/lembaga-amal-di-indonesia-pendukung-terorisme/>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*.

To date, one charitable group has taken up the cause of Indonesia IS followers stranded in Syria. Relawan Media emerged following the news in February 2019 that the Indonesian government would not repatriate ex-ISIS Indonesian citizens abroad, including those in Syria. Relawan Media has established its own bank account, Telegram group, and Instagram presence.<sup>25</sup> Leveraging the sympathy among Indonesian IS sympathizers as a result of the blacklisting of their brethren in Syria, Relawan Media began to solicit for donations to support the children and women in camps such as al-Hol. The group messaging made use of photographs and video of children braving the cold amid freshly fallen snow in northeastern Syria. The accompanying text reads, “This is the situation of the little lions of our community greeting snowfall in Syria. O brothers and sisters, Muslims are one body, don’t let your brothers of the same faith suffer the cold in this thick snow. Give them warmth with your donation.”<sup>26</sup>

## WOMEN AND CHILDREN

IS has greatly expanded the role of women and children in violent extremism. In Jemaah Islamiyah, women are typically restricted to their roles within the family unit, even if this often means they have significant positions in marriages that bind jihadist networks and in small-scale commerce that provides income. In IS, however, women and children are encouraged to be combatants and the group has used fatwas to declare participation by women as an obligation.<sup>27</sup>

Indonesian jihadists have been at the forefront of the tactical shift towards women and children. The use of women and children is

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<sup>25</sup> Telegram, 18 February 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Telegram, 17 February 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Lydia Khalil, “Behind The Veil: Women In Jihad After The Caliphate”, *Lowy Institute*, 25 June 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/behind-veil-women-jihad-after-caliphate>.

a tactical enhancement in that the family unit functioning as a cell is harder for security services to penetrate, and women and children may have advantages in evading scrutiny. Since 2015, twenty women and fifteen children have taken part in terrorism activity in Indonesia.<sup>28</sup> Indonesia saw the first ever IS family suicide bombing in the Surabaya attacks of 2018. In 2017, Dian Yulia Novi was revealed as Indonesia's first attempted lone-actor suicide bomber when she was intercepted by authorities as she plotted to attack the presidential palace.<sup>29</sup> In 2019, there were two husband-and-wife-team operations in the stabbing attack on Indonesia's chief security minister, Wiranto, and the bombing of the church in Jolo, Southern Philippines.

Given that most deportees and returnees are women and children, authorities must adapt quickly to the new reality that men may not always be the most important actors in future terrorist activity. The growing importance of women in terrorism in Indonesia is now commonly acknowledged by counterterrorism practitioners and observers. This is also acknowledged by the terrorists themselves. A message circulated on Telegram in January highlighted the plight of "sisters" who have been arrested and are now languishing in the "shackles of the evil security forces of the lackeys of the crusaders". The message called on men to help break the women free and for a "formation of martyrs to destroy the evil prisons". The message adds that the women, some of whom fought in Poso under the leadership of Santoso, "still await a beautiful age under Islamic law, enjoying time with their children."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Taktik Baru Terorisme: Sel dan Musuh Jauh", *Tempo*, 13 December 2019, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/159151/taktik-baru-terorisme-sel-dan-musuh-jauh>.

<sup>29</sup> "ISIS Unveiled: The Story Behind Indonesia's First Female Suicide Bomber", *Time*, 3 March 2017, <https://time.com/4689714/indonesia-isis-terrorism-jihad-extremism-dian-yulia-novi-fpi/>.

<sup>30</sup> "Para Umahat di Balik Penjara Thoghut Indonesia", Telegram, January 2020.



## PROBLEMS OF REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

The last five years have seen a rapid rise in terrorist arrests and incarceration due to more rigorous counterterrorism policing and a near-perfect rate of conviction. In particular, detainee numbers have spiked as a result of widespread arrests in response to attacks since the Surabaya bombings of 2018. Consequently, the under-resourcing of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes will likely be a major challenge for Indonesian counter-terrorism efforts over the next five years.

The growing prison population presents a counterterrorism and deradicalization/disengagement challenge given that a large cohort of the population in detention are on short-term sentences, below five years, and will need to be reintegrated into society when they are released at around the same time. Due to a lack of preparation for this event, government services will likely become strained. There is a risk that former convicts will be neglected and consequently fail to disengage from terrorist networks. Here again, pro-IS charities are poised to step into the vacuum left by the Indonesian government. Meanwhile, countering violent extremism (CVE) programmes run by civil society tend to confuse terrorism with issues of religious intolerance, and due to donor risk aversion, typically focus on the latter rather than the former.<sup>31</sup>

Government policies that stress Pancasila ideology as the solution to radicalism are likely to be an aggravating factor in deradicalization efforts. In his second term, President Jokowi has taken a harder line against Islamists and sought to deploy the Pancasila's principle of religious neutrality against them, seeing Islamism as an existential threat to the state.<sup>32</sup> But the use of Pancasila to counter political Islam revives

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<sup>31</sup> Kate Grealy, "Challenges to Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia", *New Mandala*, 7 March 2019, <https://www.newmandala.org/the-problems-of-countering-violent-extremism-in-indonesia/>.

<sup>32</sup> "Mahfud MD: Penataran P4 Akan Dihidupkan Kembali", *Berita Satu*, 17 February 2020, <https://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/600695/mahfud-md-penataran-p4-akan-dihidupkan-kembali>.

memories of the authoritarian Suharto regime and risks furthering radicalization.

## THE FUTURE OF JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH

Despite being eclipsed in recent years by IS, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) remains Indonesia's largest and probably most organized violent extremist organization. The group has maintained a low profile as it has eschewed the violence at home advocated by IS and pursued a strategy of quiet consolidation. As it does so, a newer generation of JI activists have become increasingly active on social media and engaged in domestic political issues. JI thus presents a challenge to counterterrorism policy given that it is hard to justify dedicated resources to tracking the group when it is IS that is the dominant threat. Yet the history of JI teaches us that the group may shift towards violent tactics in the future due to a change in ideology or it may produce a splinter group that is more willing to engage in attacks.<sup>33</sup>

Jemaah Islamiyah and IS agree on the need to impose Islamic law under an Islamic state in Indonesia. For the time being, however, JI believes Islamic law should be achieved through proselytization and without violent confrontation. Although JI supports violent jihad in Syria and other conflict zones in which its al-Qaeda allies are fighting, at home it is increasingly engaged in domestic political activism. Pro-JI media outlets such as Arramah.com, have supported the mass Islamist rallies in Jakarta known as the “212 movement”, which seek to pressure the government over aspects of Islamic law, such as blasphemy.<sup>34</sup> Pro-IS jihadists, by contrast, rejected the 212 rallies as they represented participation in an un-Islamic democratic system.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Quinton Temby, “Imagining an Islamic State in Indonesia: From Darul Islam to Jemaah Islamiyah”, *Indonesia* 89 (2010): 1–36.

<sup>34</sup> “Reuni 212 mendapat dukungan dari 202 negara”, *Ar-Rahmah*, 29 November 2019, <https://www.aramah.com/2019/11/29/reuni-212-mendapat-dukungan-dari-202-negara/>.

<sup>35</sup> Quinton Temby, Twitter thread, 12 December 2018, <https://twitter.com/quintontemby/status/1072760408346259456?s=12>.

Although IS is the immediate violent extremist threat in Indonesia, ultimately JI's more strategic "long game" may have the greater impact. JI's increasing engagement with domestic political issues allows it to find common cause with mainstream Islamists in Indonesia, opening up opportunities for recruitment. This is especially the case in a climate in which the administration of President Joko Widodo has taken an increasingly repressive line against conservative Islamists. In a political context in which constituencies are polarized between Islamists and nationalists, JI may seek to exploit the opportunity to increase its size and strength.

## **MILITANT CONVERGENCE AND POLARIZATION**

Despite the entrenched threat of terrorism in Indonesia, the country remains a stable and largely peaceful democracy and is rightly regarded as a success story, especially by regional comparison. Yet the presidential election of April 2019 revealed that the country is polarized along nationalist-Islamist lines. Non-Muslims, minorities, and pluralists voted overwhelmingly for the incumbent president, Jokowi. Meanwhile, conservative Muslims and Islamists voted overwhelmingly for populist candidate Prabowo.<sup>36</sup> Partisans of each side commonly saw the other as an "existential threat".<sup>37</sup>

When riots broke out in May 2019 following the election, led by Islamists in support of Prabowo who disputed Jokowi's victory, there was a convergence in the militant online ecosystem. On Telegram, for the first time, groups emerged where pro-ISIS militants and conservative

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<sup>36</sup> Edward Aspinall, "Indonesia's Election and the Return of Ideological Competition", *New Mandala*, 22 April 2019, <https://www.newmandala.org/indonesias-election-and-the-return-of-ideological-competition/>.

<sup>37</sup> Eve Warburton, "Polarisation in Indonesia: what if perception is reality?", *New Mandala*, 16 April 2019, <https://www.newmandala.org/how-polarised-is-indonesia/>.

Islamists, like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) found common cause. The conservatives began to adopt the terrorists' term for the Indonesian government, *toghut*, connoting a tyrannical un-Islamic regime. The two types of militants agreed on the need for Islamic law but disagreed about the means. Pro-ISIS militants argue that the FPI and the like had been foolish to participate in democracy, and had been betrayed just as the Islamists in Algeria had been denied election victory in 1992 after a military coup.

Upon re-election, Jokowi has taken a much harder line against Islamists. In November 2019 his government issued a "Joint Ministerial Decree" that established a web portal for civil servants to report each other for "radikalisme".<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, under the leadership of religion minister Fachrul Razi, a former general, the religious school curriculum is being revised, also in the name of counter-radicalization.<sup>39</sup> Polarization may be less obvious now the election is over, but the fracture remains.

The greatest risk from terrorism in Indonesia is in how it might play into the already existing schism over the issue of Islam in the state. A terrorist attack large enough to shock the political elite and provoke a widespread crackdown on peaceful Islamists might fuel militant convergence, leading to greater polarization. Terrorist groups could exploit the opportunity to recruit from non-violent conservatives who feel oppressed by the state. In this event, the quality of Indonesian democracy would be damaged. Furthermore, the opportunity for a populist Islamist candidate to run against the status quo would risk a swing to a hard-line religious government under which nationalists and secularists are repressed. Although the scenario might seem remote at the moment, the recent history of the Arab Spring should serve as a cautionary tale.

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<sup>38</sup> "SKB 11 Instansi, Darurat Radikalisme ASN?" *Tempo.co*, 2 December 2019, <https://fokus.tempo.co/read/1279015/skb-11-instansi-darurat-radikalisme-asn>.

<sup>39</sup> "Cegah Radikalisme, Kemag Revisi Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama", *Berita Satu*, 11 November 2019, <https://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/584588/cegah-radikalisme-kemag-revisi-kurikulum-pendidikan-agama>.

## **CONCLUSION**

The problem of terrorism and violent extremism in Indonesia appears much reduced since the heyday of IS's territorial caliphate. Yet the police disruption of face-to-face militant networks has potentially been offset by technological advantages militants now enjoy in terms of encrypted communications and online training. It remains hard to forecast the behaviour of jihadists in Indonesia given the always imperfect information about their organizations, networks, capabilities, and leadership. Despite the counter-terrorism successes, the authorities have continued to be surprised by ambitious violent attacks by small numbers of militants.

The greatest danger of such attacks goes to the heart of why terrorism is more than just about numbers of perpetrators and victims. Aside from the harm caused, future terrorism incidents in Indonesia hold the risk of exacerbating political tensions already generated around recent election cycles, especially the presidential election of 2019. Polarization between conservative Islamists on one side and nationalists and minorities on the other is increasingly exploited by politicians seeking office and influence. Indonesia must be prepared for violent extremists to exploit the same polarization, either violently, by launching attacks, or non-violently, by cultivating influence. Counter-terrorism policymakers must be prepared for the possibility that in the “polarization stakes”, new alliances may evolve that change the landscape of violent extremism in Indonesia.

## **TIMELINE OF TERRORISM-RELATED INCIDENTS (2018–19)**

- Deadly riot by IS detainees at Police Mobile Brigade prison (10–12 May 2018; 6 killed, multiple injured)
- Multiple suicide bomb attacks in Surabaya (13 May 2018; 24 killed, dozens injured)
- Large-scale arrests since the two incidents above, especially the mass arrests in Central Kalimantan (10–13 Jun 2018)
- Wave of returnees from Syria following the territorial defeat of IS (18 June 2019)

- Knife attack on Coordinating Security Minister Wiranto (10 October 2019)
- Death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (28 October 2019)
- Suicide bomb attack on Medan Police headquarters (13 November 2019; 1 killed, 6 injured)
- MIT oath of allegiance to new IS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi (November 2019)

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