

**THE ONGOING PROBLEM
OF PRO-ISIS CELLS IN INDONESIA**

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Easter Sunday suicide bombings in Sri Lanka underscore how fortunate Indonesia has been in recent years to have had such low-calibre terrorists and such high-calibre counter-terrorism police. It has also been fortunate in having benign neighbours and a stable domestic political environment, short-lived election disputes notwithstanding. But with the enormity of the Sri Lankan attack still unfolding as this report went to press, it remains important to continually assess how pro-ISIS groups in Indonesia are evolving and what local, regional and international drivers are at play.

As in Sri Lanka, local groups have not been discouraged by ISIS defeats in the Middle East but rather emboldened by them to wage war at home, in accordance with ISIS central directives. Indonesian groups have been weakened in the last year, but more by the massive wave of arrests following the May 2018 Surabaya suicide bombings than by any developments in Syria. Those arrests targeted the largest Indonesian pro-ISIS coalition, Jamaah Ansharul Daulah (JAD), damaging the structure but leaving behind several territorial units that remain determined to act on their own.

In addition, many cells have emerged that never had any affiliation with JAD or with other existing pro-ISIS organisations such as Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah (JAK) in Solo. This second category includes people who sought to join JAD but were rejected as being insufficiently committed. There are also cells composed of ISIS supporters who were never interested in JAD but tried to find fellow fighters through online and offline recruitment. For both those who tried and failed to join JAD and those who deliberately stayed away, there was a sense that JAD was arrogant and elitist, its members contemptuous of anyone outside its ranks. Almost all these unaffiliated cells therefore had a desire to win recognition from ISIS central through violence, if only to put JAD in its place.

Despite the proliferation of these cells, their capacity has remained very low, so there has been little that anyone in Indonesia could report as accomplishments to ISIS media outlets. The last acts in Indonesia for which ISIS claimed credit were the 2018 Surabaya bombings; by contrast, nearly every issue of *an-Naba*, the weekly online ISIS newsletter, has a report from “East Asia Wilayah” (the Philippines) about a successful attack by ISIS fighters on the Philippine military or police.

Many of these ad-hoc cells in Indonesia have been hampered by geographic dispersal of members, if they were formed online, and by a general absence of any vetting, training or indoctrination procedures, let alone security precautions. Most have been easily infiltrated or otherwise have come to the attention of police, although a few managed to escape notice. One of these was a cell in Sibolga, North Sumatra where extremists managed to purchase 400 kg of explosives undetected, and the wife of the leader detonated bombs that flattened an entire neighbourhood on 12 March 2019. Miraculously, no one but the woman and her child were killed, but it was a reminder of what a few determined individuals could do.

Independent cells generally have a short life span. The point of the cell is to plan an act of violence, and if there is no action, the group falls apart. The closer it gets to actually undertaking an operation, the higher the risk of being caught, and whether the attempt fails or succeeds, it is generally followed by a quick round-up of the key players by police. But there is also a constant process of regrouping and realignment, so the disappearance of one cell is quickly followed by the emergence of another.

The danger has always been that someone with technical expertise and combat experience would return from Syria to turn a handful of ISIS supporters into a more serious threat. Thus far, it has not happened. While hundreds of Indonesians were deported from Turkey after getting caught trying to join ISIS, no one with ISIS combat experience is known to have returned since

ISIS's rapid loss of territory in 2017-18. Most of the senior Indonesian ISIS leaders were dead by early 2019: BahrumSyah in April 2018, Bahrin Naim in November 2018, Faiz alias Abu Walid in January 2019. Several others, including Munawar Kholil, are known to be in the custody of the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeastern Syria. It would not be impossible for someone with violent intentions to return to Indonesia unnoticed but the level of vigilance of immigration officers in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia is high. (A non-Indonesian with ISIS links coming in to the country might actually be a bigger danger.) In Sri Lanka, intelligence services appear to have been more focused on the Tamil and Sinhalese communities than on radicalised Muslims and so missed a growing threat. In Indonesia, pro-ISIS groups are at the top of the country's security concerns, and despite turf battles among security agencies, there is no way a well-founded warning of an attack would be ignored.

The appearance of a woman bomber in Sri Lanka, who blew herself and her children up when approached by police, shows how important women have now become in pro-ISIS networks. From the beginning they played important roles as teachers, couriers, propagandists and financiers but in the new decentralised ISIS world, they are playing combat roles as well. When three families of men, women and children became suicide bombers in Surabaya in 2018, it seemed at the time to be a one-off incident. What mother would strap bombs to young sons and daughters? Surabaya now seems to have been an inspiration for Sibolga, and the involvement of the Sri Lankan woman suggests this could now be a broader phenomenon. Indonesia thus needs to try to keep track of the Indonesian women who married non-Indonesian men in Syria as well as look closely at the background of women now in Kurdish detention who stayed through the fall of the last ISIS strongholds in Syria but now want to return. It also needs more women in Detachment 88, the counter-terrorism unit.

This report explores the emergence of independent ISIS cells in Indonesia that are committed to violence. All of these groups have thus far proved well within the capacity of Indonesia to manage, even if a few slip through the cracks. Nothing suggests this is likely to change in the immediate future, but Indonesian police should be aware that in the wake of the Sri Lanka bombings, churches may have taken on an enhanced significance as targets for self-styled ISIS fighters.

Indonesia has been lucky thus far that its terrorists generally have had too little experience to think big. With a little imagination and better leadership, these pro-ISIS cells could do far greater damage.

II. INDEPENDENT CELLS AND THE LEGACY OF BAHRUN NAIM

The proliferation of independent pro-ISIS cells in Indonesia fits a long-standing pattern. Such cells have emerged in the past from government crackdowns on the dominant group, personal rivalries among would-be leaders, ideological debates or a desire to demonstrate commitment to doubting peers. Noordin Top emerged from the wave of arrests of Jemaah Islamiyah members following the 2002 Bali bombs. Aman Abdurrahman's network emerged as a challenge to Noordin Top and differences over the ultimate goal of jihadi attacks. The emergence of unaffiliated pro-ISIS cells after the JAD structure was hit with more than 300 arrests between May and December 2018 was therefore to be expected (as will some eventual regrouping and alliance-building in the

months to come).¹

Some of the cells discovered after May 2018 included the following:

- June 2018: Seven members of a cell called Lion of Allah, after the name of a group they formed on the social media application Telegram, were arrested in Kebumen, Bandung and Bekasi. They were planning to attack police in Kebumen and hoped to set up a base there. Led by one Rusdi, they had met each other online and most had become radicalised through the Internet.
- July 2018: Ten members of a group called Ansharul Kholaqoh were arrested in Palembang. The group was led by Suparman alias Daud, a former criminal offender who became radicalised in prison after contact with Abu Husna, head of the Solo-based pro-ISIS group called Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah (JAK). It was reportedly planning attacks on police.
- August 2018: Three members of a cell based in Tegal and Pemalang were arrested. Their leader, ex-JAD member Mahfudin, had been arrested in May trying to come to the aid of rioting inmates at the Brimob detention center. All had been involved in armed robberies to get money to aid families of pro-ISIS prisoners and fighters.
- August 2018: Six former members JAD-West Sumatra, led by Mas Yusral, formed a pro-ISIS cell aimed at attacking police.
- August 2018: A group called 554, after verse 54 in Surat al-Maidah (the fifth surah of the Qur'an), was arrested in Bogor. Led by Slamet Nur Arifin from Nganjuk, East Java, its members were conducting physical fitness training with the vague hope of eventually going to the Philippines or carrying out an attack in Indonesia.
- September 2018: Seven men in a pro-ISIS cell based in Cirebon and Brebes were arrested after the shooting of two police in Cirebon.
- March 2019: A cell with serious explosives expertise was discovered in Sibolga, North Sumatra (see below). Through links with a Facebook group, its membership reached into Lampung, East Kalimantan, and Jakarta.

The striking characteristic of these cells is the members' near-total lack of military training or combat experience. These are men and women attracted to ISIS but who never trained in Afghanistan or Mindanao and who grew up after the worst of the communal conflicts in Ambon and Poso had passed.² When one JAD member went to Mindanao to buy guns in 2016, he realised after he purchased them that not one member of his network knew how to use firearms.³ Military "training" for these groups generally consists of physical fitness exercises and hill-

1 The ideological justification for these groups can be found in the writings of al-Qaeda ideologue, Abu Musab al-Suri, whose main tract, *Da'wah al-Muqawwamah al-Islamiyyah al-Alamiyyah*, was translated into Indonesian around 2007. An Indonesian excerpt was published in 2009 under the title of *Perjalanan Gerakan Jihad (1930-2002)* by Jazera press, a publishing company linked to Jemaah Islamiyah. Al-Suri argued that jihad involving large, hierarchically structured organisations was ineffective and potentially dangerous, because if the leader was caught, a round-up of members could follow, exposing the entire network. The alternative was *jihad fardiyah* (individual jihad), fought by autonomous cells working separately toward a shared goal. As long as jihad is an individual obligation for all Muslims, anyone can undertake an operation at any time, without the need for permission from an organisation or leader. This way, if police manage to capture and dismantle one cell, the others can continue their actions because they have no link to those arrested.

2 JAD had several Mindanao veterans, including Suryadi Mas'ood, but the independent cells had none. The big communal conflicts in post-Soeharto Indonesia, involving intense Christian-Muslim fighting, took place in Maluku, North Maluku and Poso, Central Sulawesi, with the most serious violence between 1999 and 2002. The violence enabled extremist groups to establish bases for ongoing attacks.

3 West Jakarta District Court, trial dossier of Suryadi Mas'ood, 4 April 2017.

walking because it is rare for anyone to have the background for instruction in weaponry, shart-shooting, “field engineering” or other military skills. They therefore all rely heavily on online instructional material on how to make bombs.

Inspire, the online magazine of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), pioneered the concept of instructions for non-specialists in how to make weapons and mount attacks, with one of its most widely used articles entitled “Make a Bomb in Kitchen of Your Mom”.⁴ It first appeared in 2010 and was almost immediately translated into Indonesian, but none of the bombs produced as a result worked as the would-be terrorists had hoped.

The pro-ISIS cells that emerged from 2015 onwards had much better materials to work from: the detailed how-to manuals on bomb construction compiled by Bahrūn Naim, an Indonesian based in Syria with ISIS from January 2015 until his death from an airstrike in November 2018. Bahrūn Naim repeatedly tried to organise independent pro-ISIS cells and instigate acts of violence in Indonesia from his base in Raqqa, but not a single one succeeded – in part because he had no experience himself in conducting a terrorist operation and had little sense of the practical obstacles that would-be operatives in Indonesia faced. His manuals, however, were widely circulated and even people who never had direct contact with the man himself tried to make bombs following his instructions – including some of the cells that emerged after Naim was killed.

From the time Bahrūn Naim was first attracted to ISIS, he supported the concept of autonomous cells.⁵ He considered JAD to be a feudal organisation in which the amir’s orders must be followed without question and seniority was more important than creativity. At one point he told his friends, “In JAD, if you’re not old, you’re not allowed to speak”.⁶ He rejected JAD’s aspirations to carve out a territory that could become the nucleus of an Islamic State. ISIS had already declared a caliphate, he reasoned – why did its supporters in Indonesia need to worry about territory?⁷ Naim maintained that ISIS had never instructed its followers to set up an organisation. It issued only two orders: migrate to Syria or wage war. From the moment ISIS was attacked by coalition forces in the last half of 2014, the urgency was to carry out attacks wherever and however possible, and small cells were the best vehicle for doing so.

His belief in the importance of such cells intensified after he studied how ISIS had succeeded in establishing the caliphate by following the strategy outlined in Abu Bakar An Najdi’s *Idarah Tawawusyi*: the key to political victory (*tamkin siyasi*) is to make the government weak by creating chaos.⁸ If jihad cells are sufficiently numerous and isolated from one another, they can carry out repeated actions in a way that law enforcement cannot stop.

Naim began by distributing instructional materials in early 2015 on how to make bombs on his blog: <http://innamadunyafanaa.blogspot.co.id>. The blog, which was banned many times only to reappear under a new name, including www.bahrunnaim.co, was inspired by AQAP’s *Inspire* and “e-jihad” learning, in the belief that one did not have to travel abroad to learn the basics of military science. He hoped that Indonesian ISIS supporters who wanted to take part in jihad operations would be motivated by the availability of these materials, and he compiled all the contents into an e-book which remains in use after his death. He also opened an online

4 Hilary A. Sarat-St. Peter, “‘Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom’: Jihadist Tactical Technical Communication and the Everyday Practice of Cooking,” *Technical Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No.1, pp. 76-91.

5 For more on Bahrūn Naim’s background, see IPAC, “Disunity among Indonesian ISIS Supporters and the Risk of More Violence,” Report No.25, 1 February 2016 and “The Failed Solo Suicide Bombing and Bahrūn Naim’s Network,” Report No.30, 29 July 2016.

6 Dossier of Hendrasti Wijanarko, a protégé of Bahrūn Naim, 30 October 2017.

7 This position reflected an old debate going back to 2005 between Aman Abdurrahman, who supported *jihad tanzim* or “settled jihad”, that is, jihad in the service of an Islamic State, versus Noordin Top, a Malaysian ex-JI leader, who supported *jihad nikayah*, or repeated strikes against the enemy as exemplified by the tactics of Abu Musab Zarqawi in Iraq (founder of the Islamic State of Iraq, predecessor of ISIS).

8 Ibid.

consultation on how to make bombs.

Every action he tried to incite failed.

- August 2015: Naim drew friends and former classmates from Solo into a pro-ISIS group on Telegram called Jaisul Daulah Khilafah (JDK) Forum. They became the core members of a Blasting and Electronic Division, with Naim providing online tutorials in bomb-making. At Naim's instigation, they planned a coordinated attack on three targets in Solo for 17 August 2015, but Detachment 88 intercepted their communications and almost everyone was arrested.⁹ Naim drew the conclusion that the failure was due in part to the fact that cell members all knew one another and were in constant communication, so when one got arrested, the others were caught as well.
- July 2016: A suicide bombing at the Solo police headquarters killed only the bomber and did no serious damage. This time Naim had recruited individuals who did not know each other and who communicated only through him. The team was largely incompetent, however, the bomber most of all.¹⁰
- August 2016: Naim recruited Gigih Rahmat Dewa, an ex-Hizbut Tahrir activist who had been a class below Naim at the same high school in Solo. Gigih had moved to Batam to and recruited fellow ISIS supporters there, first via Telegram, then in person. When they met for the first time, they agreed to form a group called Khatibah Gonggong Rebus (KGR). They discussed trying to attack Singapore with rocket launchers, though they had no weapons and not the remotest chance of being able to do anything of the sort. Bahrin Naim arranged for a few Uighurs to join them and promised to send someone who could help them build rockets. They were caught by police before they could do anything.
- December 2016: A plot to bomb the presidential palace involving what would have been Indonesia's first female suicide bomber was uncovered by police and the perpetrators arrested before they could place the bomb. Naim was instrumental in supporting the idea of women's martyrdom and the possibility of women acting alone to undertake jihad operations.¹¹

Naim's main legacy was therefore not, as he had hoped, the weakening of the Indonesian state through repeated attacks. He did leave behind his manuals. He also may have popularised recruitment through social media and support for women as combatants.

III. FIVE CASES OF UNAFFILIATED PRO-ISIS JIHAD CELLS

The idea of individual jihad (*jihad fardiyah*) had a particular appeal for ISIS sympathisers who could not go to Syria, who lacked links to a larger organisation like JAD, or who had been JAD members but whose leaders had been arrested. In the case studies that follow, several characteristics of these independent cells stand out. They were generally very small, three or four men; they lacked firearms, so attacks on police had a practical aim – to get guns – as well as an ideological one; the targets were mostly local, save the one group that wanted to attack the Myanmar embassy; they had no idea how to plan a serious operation; and they were quickly detected.

9 The three targets were a police post; a church in Solo to avenge the destruction of a mosque in Tolikara, Papua; and a temple to avenge anti-Muslim violence by Buddhists in Myanmar. See IPAC, "The Failed Solo Suicide Bombing", op.cit..

10 Ibid.

11 IPAC, "Mothers to Bombers: The Evolution of Indonesian Women Extremists", Report No.35, 31 January 2017, p.22.

A. *The Case of Syawaluddin Pakpahan*

Syawaludin Pakpahan, born in Medan in 1984, became the only Indonesian returnee from Syria to become involved in violence after his return – but he was with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), not ISIS.

Syawaludin had been obsessed with jihad since the outbreak of the Ambon and Poso conflicts in 1999-2000. He had registered to go to Ambon at the local Muhammadiyah mosque but had not been called up by the time the conflicts died down. He continued to follow radical sites like *arrahmah.com* and taught himself as much as he could by reading books about jihad. When the Syria conflict erupted, he was eager to join. In 2013, he established contact with someone from the Free Syrian Army, a faction composed mainly of defectors from the Syrian military. He then mortgaged his land and used the money to fund his travel to Syria, where he took part in FSA military training for twelve days. He was the only Indonesian participant. After training, he was given an AK47 rifle and fought alongside FSA forces as well as serving as a guard at an FSA post. The post was close to guard posts of ISIS and the Nusra Front, the al-Qaeda-linked faction in the war, and Syawaludin sometimes met and chatted with members of both groups. From these discussions, he concluded that their views were closer to his than the FSA's were, and he sometimes joined them in guard duty, angering the FSA commander. Eventually he was summoned and ordered to turn in his weapon and go home. In July 2013, Syawaludin Pakpahan returned to Indonesia.

He got back just as ISIS was becoming a major new force in the Syrian conflict, with a string of battlefield victories. Syawaludin bought a computer just to follow ISIS developments online, and he and three friends began watching ISIS videos and following its propaganda on pro-ISIS websites. They decided to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and met regularly to study ISIS ideology, beginning with the notion that any government which did not enforce Islamic law should be branded as *kafir*, or non-Muslim. Syawaludin was the recognised leader of the group because of his experience in Syria. At no time did the four friends try to join up with JAD or other Indonesian pro-ISIS groups.

Their commitment to wage a jihad in Indonesia strengthened with the campaign that began in September 2016 against the then-governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaya Purnama, better known as Ahok – a rare example of violent extremists taking their cue from political activists. They were angry with Ahok's alleged blasphemy, for which he was later prosecuted and convicted.¹² In 2017, they began intensive discussions about carrying out a jihad operation. The initial plan was to attack ethnic Chinese in the area of Medan known as Mega Medan Asia, first because Ahok himself was of Chinese descent and second, because China was considered to have helped the government of Bashar al-Assad against ISIS.

They had no weapons, however, so they decided to seize guns from police and the military. They accordingly conducted a survey to find out the number of personnel on guard and firearms used by security forces at different posts around the city, including the North Sumatra regional police command; the provincial headquarters of the paramilitary police (Brigade Mobil, Brimob); the military's combat battalion headquarters; and the provincial military resort command, KODAM Bukit Barisan. All had tight security, however, and the four would need weapons, even to get weapons.

They finally decided to target the regional police command at night, when the guards were less vigilant, and the surrounding area was quiet, and chose the last night of Ramadan 2017 for the attack, with a minimum target of at least one firearm. Syawaludin and two friends attacked the guards with knives, killing one. The plan to seize a gun failed, however, because one of

¹² For background on the anti-Ahok campaign, see IPAC, "After Ahok: The Islamist Agenda in Indonesia," Report No.44, 6 April 2018.

the victim's friends opened fire. Syawaludin and a friend were injured, while their accomplice, Ardial Ramadhana, was killed. On 16 May 2018, Syawaludin was sentenced to nineteen years in prison.

B. Syam Ferry Anto and the "Bombermen"

Syam Ferry Anto alias Abu Kahfi from Padang Sidempuan in West Sumatra was another ISIS sympathiser. He became passionate about jihad in 2016 from reading ISIS materials online and was an avid follower of Bahrin Naim's blog. He was so eager to join JAD that he claimed to be the JAD amir for Java even though he was never a real member.

Syam decided to form a jihad cell on his own and looked for possible participants on pro-ISIS social media, including Telegram and Facebook. One was Rizki Anggara Putra, a native of Bekasi living in Kalimantan, who was an enthusiastic supporter of ISIS on different Telegram groups, including *Kajian Tauhid* and *Lintas Sumatera*. In November 2016, Syam Ferry contacted Rizki via Facebook to ask him to join a new group on Telegram called "Bombermen". Syam became the group administrator and at its height, before Syam was arrested in 2018, it had some fifteen members from West Java, Central Java, Kalimantan and elsewhere.

The Bombermen group became an instructional site for "field engineering", a euphemism for terrorism skills, using Bahrin Naim's online manuals. Like most would-be jihad cells, however, this one had little experience, capacity or weapons. One big barrier to cells formed online is the geographic dispersal of members, which complicates planning, and "Bombermen" was no exception. In early 2017 Syam Ferry ordered four group members – who had never met each other in person – to conduct a survey on some cafes and the houses of police officials in Menteng, an elite residential area of Jakarta. None of them lived in Jakarta, however, so the survey never took place. In October 2017, as violence against Rohingya in Myanmar made headlines in Indonesia, Syam Ferry and his friends decided on two more attacks that they were ill-equipped to carry out. One was to bomb the Myanmar embassy in Jakarta; the other was to set off a bomb at the wedding in Solo in November 2017 of Kahiyang Ayu, the daughter of President Jokowi. Before either could take place, Syam Ferry Anto and Rizki Anggara were arrested by police.

C. The Cirebon Shooters

Following massive arrests of suspected JAD members by Detachment 88 from May 2018 onwards, some JAD members decided to go it alone. Rajendra Sulistiyanto alias Jendra and Suherman alias Herman from JAD Brebes were two. Jendra had sworn allegiance to al-Baghdadi in July 2014 in a ceremony at the mosque on the campus of the State Islamic University in Jakarta. Herman was a former criminal offender recruited while in Cirebon prison by Heru Komarudin, a militant linked to the April 2011 bombing of the az-Zikr Mosque in Cirebon who had been released in 2017. Jendra and Herman had tried to go to the aid of the rioting inmates at the Brimob center, together with a group of Cirebon activists led by Heru Komarudin. Most were intercepted and arrested in the Bekasi area, but Jendra and Herman escaped.

They reasoned that since they were already on the wanted list, they should try and attack the security forces before they were arrested. If they were going to die anyway, they preferred to die as martyrs. Accordingly, in June 2018, they planned an attack on the police, hoping to obtain weapons as well as injure or kill their targets. On 11 July, they stopped an officer on his way to work the evening shift at the Bulakamba police station in Brebes and hacked at him with a machete. The officer sustained a deep cut on his arm but quickly recovered; Jendra and Herman fled, without taking his gun. They hid out for almost a month. Then, in August 2018, they decided to try again and invited two friends – Mohamad Untung, from JAD-Cirebon and

Ica Ardeboran from JAD-Majalengka – to join them in a jihad cell which would undertake an operation around Cirebon and Brebes. Both agreed, and Ica was appointed the cell's amir. On 20 August, Jendra and Herman assaulted a traffic police officer in Cirebon and succeeded in taking his gun. Police initially treated the assault as an ordinary crime, not linked to terrorism. Encouraged, the friends planned another attack. On 24 August, armed with the gun and joined by Untung and Ica, the men shot two traffic policemen at Km 224 on the Kanci-Pejagan toll road, then fled to Brebes. One officer, Aiptu Dodon Kusgiantoro, died from a chest wound; the other, Aiptu Widi, was shot in the hand and survived.

Detachment 88 gave the case top priority and on 3 September, they tracked the four down to their hideout in Kalisalak, Margasari, Tegal. Jendra and Ica were killed in the operation, while Herman and Untung were captured alive and were on trial as of April 2019. There were others arrested in the case, including Rajendra's two brothers, for failing to inform authorities about suspicious activities, but the cell was composed only of the four men.

D. JAD-Pemalang Member Joins Non-JAD in Tegal

There have also been several cases of JAD members leaving JAD to join independent jihad cells where they could play a larger role or had a greater possibility of action. One example is Mahfudin, a member of JAD-Pemalang in Central Java. His brother, Fahrudin, was active in JAD-Tegal and invited Mahfudin to join a religious study session (*pengajian*) there at the home of Ali Mahmudin. In 2015 Mahfudin was chosen to join a JAD team with members from Tegal and West Java to carry out jihad operations. Some members of the team were involved in the attack in central Jakarta (the so-called Thamrin bombing) in January 2016, and their capture led to the arrest of Ali Mahmudin and Fahrudin. Mahfudin himself was not involved but went into hiding for a few months in Pemalang. When the atmosphere cooled down, he began looking for his old ISIS friends on Facebook, posting a message that read, "Any AD in Tegal?" AD was short for Ansharul Daulah or supporters of Islamic State. One person who responded was Yoni Wahyudi. A Banten native born in 1982, Yoni had been running an eyeglasses shop, Optimal Optik, in Tegal for five years and had no affiliation to JAD. Yoni and Mahfudin agreed to meet face to face, and Yoni invited another friend to join them. They discussed forming a cell specifically to carry out robberies that could finance the movement and assist the families of JAD members who had been arrested like Fahrudin. Mahfudin also invited Wahyu, a member of JAD-Pemalang to join. The cell thus consisted of four men, with Mahfudin chosen as *amir*.

The cell undertook several robberies in 2016 and 2017, including of an Alfamart (a popular convenience store), with the proceeds distributed to the families of JAD-Tegal members in custody. But the group wanted to do something bigger, so they decided to attack the police. After the May 2018 riot by terrorist suspects at the detention center run by the paramilitary police, Brimob, in a Jakarta suburb, Mahfudin decided to try and join the rioters. He found himself under arrest, and the other three members of his cell were then arrested in June 2019.

E. Rejected by JAD: Jhon Hen

Most would-be terrorists crave publicity and want to be recognised as having pulled off an attack that no one thought they could do. One example is John Hen, a former soldier who had been imprisoned for a criminal offence in Tanjung Gusta, the main prison in Medan. He was radicalised there by Toni Togar, a JI member and when he was released, he became a member the above-ground shari'ah advocacy group founded by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI). He also joined the National Anti-Shi'a Alliance (ANAS) where he became friends with a few other members (Reza Alfino, Azaam al-Ghazwah) who were attracted by ISIS

and swore oaths of allegiance to al-Baghdadi.

Jhon Hen and his friends wanted to join JAD, so much so that they had started referring to themselves as JAD-Medan. Sometime in 2017, they went to Lampung to meet Sahir, a JAD leader there and asked to join. Sahir, however, saw their membership in ANAS as proof that they lacked the ideological commitment to join ISIS. While one might think that joining an anti-Shi'a alliance would be seen as an asset, JAD believed that ANAS simply wanted a change in policy but still acknowledged the right of the Indonesian republic to exist – when it should have been rejecting it outright. The friends returned to Medan, frustrated.

They decided to start their own military training program with martial arts exercises; they also bought ammunition and started looking for weapons. But after Syawaludin Pakpahan's attack on police on the eve of Idul Fitri 2017, Jhon Hen and his friends were arrested, even though they had nothing to do with the attack. They must have been under surveillance for their pro-ISIS activities and once they were caught, police decided they had enough to prosecute them.

IV. THE SIBOLGA BOMBING

One of the most striking examples of an independent jihad cell was the group behind the March 2019 Sibolga bombing.

The story of the Sibolga bombing begins with Asmar Husain alias Abu Hamzah, an electrical technician and a former member of Darul Islam/Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) in Sibolga. In his mid-thirties in 2018, he had left NII in 2008 because he felt the organisation was more concerned with soliciting contributions than waging jihad. He and his wife, Marnita Sari Boru Hutauruk alias Solimah, and some of his friends in Sibolga became interested in ISIS in 2016 and began searching the Internet to learn more. After the late ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani issued a call to supporters to take action at home if they could not move to Syria, Abu Hamzah and his friends swore allegiance to al-Baghdadi and decided to carry out a bomb attack in Sibolga. Abu Hamzah would make the bombs, while a friend, Azmil Khair alias Ameng, helped finance the purchase of explosives from his business activities. They purchased large quantities of “black powder” (a mixture of potassium nitrate, carbon and sulfur) from a chemical shop in Sibolga. Abu Hamzah had considered triacetone triperoxide (TATP), also known as the “mother of Satan”, the favourite explosive of ISIS bombers and the one used in the Sri Lanka bombs but rejected it because he learned it could be very unstable. Assisted by his wife who was at least as radical as he was, he turned his house into a kind of bomb laboratory. Throughout 2016 and 2017, he and his wife managed to mix more than 400 kg of explosives. But Abu Hamzah was not satisfied with the results because the bombs were still low explosive. He studied Internet materials again to learn how to make them more powerful and found he could do so by adding several chemicals, including aluminum powder. By 2018, Abu Hamzah had succeeded in preparing about 100 kg of high explosives. He also made several detonators, drawing on his electrical skills.

Then in May 2018, the Surabaya suicide bombings took place, involving three families who attacked churches or in one case, died when the bomb went off prematurely. The bombings caused controversy among ISIS supporters, particularly after Aman Abdurrahman, the detained radical cleric and founder of JAD, condemned the attack because it involved women and children as bombers.

Abu Hamzah had discussed the matter with his wife, but he argued that Aman's ruling could not be followed because Aman was in prison, and according to him, fatwas of prisoners need not be obeyed because of the possibility that they were issued under pressure. The Surabaya bomb also raised the determination of Abu Hamzah to undertake a similar bombing, one which would

also involve his wife and children.¹³

A serious plan only began to take shape after Abu Hamzah got to know Rinto Sugianto alias Putra Syuhada via social media. Rinto himself was from Lampung but had never been a member of the JAD branch there. Like Abu Hamzah, he became radicalised online. He then began to look for new friends on Facebook who agreed with his views and who had the ability to make bombs. He regularly posted pro-ISIS tracts on his Facebook page, and when someone made a comment that he considered interesting, he would contact the individual privately and invite him or her to discussions on a closed Facebook chat about undertaking an attack. Members came from all over: Lampung, West Java, North Sumatra, West Kalimantan, Central Java, East Java and elsewhere.

The online meeting between Rinto and Abu Hamzah not only united the two groups but also reinforced the desire of both to undertake an attack. In Abu Hamzah's group, only he and his wife were willing to conduct suicide bombings, while the others were only willing to help with funding. But Abu Hamzah needed more people. Unusually for an Indonesian terrorist, he was thinking big – he wanted to pull off something colossal although he apparently never thought of a target beyond Simbolga. Rinto's Facebook group had many people eager to act, but they lacked the ability to make bombs. When Abu Hamzah and Rinto met in Sibolga in February 2019, they agreed on a merger of their two groups.

It turned out that Abu Hamzah's wife Marnita was not the only woman eager for action. Rinto suggested two women in his group who seemed to be the most enthusiastic about sacrificing themselves. One was Roslina, from Tanjung Balai. She was the widow of Hendry Syahli Manuring, an ISIS supporter whom Detachment 88 had shot and killed in an operation in Tanjung Balai in October 2018. A second was Yuliati Sri Rahayuningrum alias Khodijah, an ISIS supporter from Klaten. Because both women needed to come to Sibolga to get instructions from Abu Hamzah, it was agreed that he should marry both so there would be nothing untoward about them staying in his house. Marnita approved this arrangement, and it was she who contacted Roslina and Yuliati. Both were eager to come. Yuliati, who was married, was prepared to leave her husband and family to marry Abu Hamzah. After the marriage, the five of them – Roslina, Yuliati, Marnita, Abu Hamzah and Rinto planned to carry out coordinated suicide bombings at several police stations in Sibolga.

Rinto then returned to Lampung, with a bomb prepared by Abu Hamzah as a souvenir. He foolishly told his parents of his plans, hoping to get their blessing for his willingness to die as a martyr. Instead, his parents forbade him to act. When Rinto insisted, his parents reported him to the police, figuring it was better for their child to be arrested than to lose him to a bombing. Local police and Detachment 88 then arrested Rinto on 9 March 2019 and confiscated Abu Hamzah's bomb that he had hidden under the roof of his house.

The police investigation that followed broke open the Sibolga network. On 12 March 2019, Detachment 88 arrested Abu Hamzah, who went quietly. It was Marnita who resisted. When police came to search the house, she threw a bomb from the roof, injuring a policeman. She refused to surrender, staying in the house with at least one child. For hours, police, community leaders and her husband tried to persuade her to give herself up. She refused, and in the early hours of 13 March, Marnita chose to blow herself up together with her child (a second child may also have been killed but this remains unclear). The bombs she detonated had unimaginable explosive power. Abu Hamzah's house and three adjacent houses were totally destroyed and

13 IPAC acknowledges that it was wrong in its prediction, made in the report entitled "The Surabaya Bombings and the Future of ISIS in Indonesia" (18 October 2018) that the Surabaya bombing would not serve as a model for future actions. We argued that because of the horror generated even among radicals at the thought of young children wearing explosive vests and being urged by their parents to become martyrs, the idea of family suicide bombings would not catch on. At least in the case of Abu Hamzah, we were mistaken.

some 150 other houses in a 100-metre radius were seriously damaged. It was the biggest bomb ever made by ISIS supporters in Indonesia, and it was nothing short of a miracle that no one else was killed.

Police moved quickly to arrest members of Abu Hamzah's network in Sibolga and Rinto's Facebook network in Sumatra, Kalimantan and Java. Among them were Abu Hamzah's prospective brides. Roslina alias Syuhama was arrested in Tanjung Balai and Yuliati alias Khodijah was arrested in Klaten. Yuliati, however, decided like Marnita that it was better to die than be detained, and she killed herself in custody by drinking cleaning liquid that she found in the toilet.

The Sibolga cell was another example of a jihad cell unaffiliated to any existing organisation and as a result difficult to detect. Detachment 88's cyber patrol managed to pick up Rinto's postings but Abu Hamzah remained off their radar until Rinto was captured.

V. CONCLUSION: JIHAD CELLS, THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND FUTURE THREATS

The many examples of independent jihad cells in Indonesia mean that ISIS still has a support base, and while there is little likelihood of a Sri Lanka-style attack, it is important that vigilance remain high. Several issues need attention:

- The government needs a plan for the return of Indonesian ISIS members stranded in Syria, especially those now in Kurdish detention. One question is how many are there. In Roj camp, in northeastern Syria, NGOs identified 38 Indonesians, including fifteen children born in Syria. Some 50 are believed to be in a second camp, al-Hol, and there may be others elsewhere. Of those who wish to return, what did role did they play with ISIS? How will men and women be assessed in terms of who should be prosecuted and who rehabilitated? What programs will be in place for the children? What preparation will there be for local communities where they will eventually resettle?
- Better programs are also needed for pro-ISIS women detainees. There are now fifteen pro-ISIS women in detention, some of whom were actively involved in violence. Understanding the backgrounds and motivations of these women is essential for preparing a more targeted rehabilitation program, and they themselves may have ideas about prevention strategies. ISIS may have reluctantly accepted women as combatants, but they are now encouraged to take part in operations. In a move that was strikingly reminiscent of Sibolga, the wife of one of the Sri Lankan bombers detonated a bomb that killed her and her children when police arrived to raid their house.¹⁴
- Given the increasing role of women in jihad operations, more women need to be recruited and trained as members of Detachment 88, including for its intelligence unit. The percentage of women in the police more generally remains woefully low, just over 8 per cent.
- The Sri Lankan attacks underscore how much ISIS has encouraged attacks on Christians. ISIS has long identified Christians and Jews as particular enemies and urged the killings of these "idolators" (*mushrikin*).¹⁵ The publicity and the scale of the Sri Lanka attacks could increase the attraction of attacks on churches for Indonesian ISIS supporters.

14 "Pregnant wife of Sri Lanka bomber detonates suicide vest, killing children and police," www.abc.net.au, 25 April 2019.

15 See for example, "The Ruling on the Belligerent Christians" in the online ISIS bulletin *Rumiyah*, Edition 9, May 2017, p.4-5.

- Indonesia needs to be alert to conflict areas outside Syria where Indonesians and extremists from other countries might meet. Indonesian ISIS supporters have shown a particular interest in “Khorasan”, the ISIS “province” in Afghanistan. Police in December stopped a former prisoner who was trying to travel there

The existence of small cells also means that sooner or later, one of them is likely to think of copying the kind of attack that has taken place elsewhere but that to date has not been tried in Indonesia: a truck attack; a random stabbing of a foreigner; a mall shooting. It is easy to dismiss the competence of Indonesian terrorists, but as long they continue to subscribe to ISIS ideology, they remain a serious threat.

INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT (IPAC)

The Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) was founded in 2013 on the principle that accurate analysis is a critical first step toward preventing violent conflict. Our mission is to explain the dynamics of conflict—why it started, how it changed, what drives it, who benefits—and get that information quickly to people who can use it to bring about positive change.

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