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**Jemaah Islamiyah:
Of Kin and Kind**

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ABSTRACT

Convicted terrorists from Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) have attested to using the Internet in one way or another during their operations, from sending messages to one another to looking for extremist *fatwas* online to justify their actions. That said, one would however be hard pressed to prove the primacy of the Internet in their step up to violence. More often than not, more traditional elements remain the key to individual religious radicalization and political violence in Southeast Asia — blood relations and marriage ties. This paper revisits these kinship linkages as well as quasi-kinship ones that include teacher-disciple bonds and the wider fraternity of *ikhwan*-ship (brotherhood) with particular regard to JI. Keeping counterterrorism efforts in context is important or else governments could run the risk of carelessly appropriating vital resources on less immediate concerns.

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Jemaah Islamiyah: Of Kin and Kind

Introduction: Prioritizing concerns

There has been much media attention accorded to the rise of lone-wolf Islamist terrorists whose journeys towards religious radicalization and political violence were enabled and facilitated through their consumption of extremist materials especially prevalent on the Internet. Youths and young adults alienated from mainstream society, as the argument largely goes, then gravitate towards one another online and form virtual extremist communities whose ideology helps make sense of their personal grievances and whose cause resonates so much with them that they become willing to engage in violence.¹

The premise, in all honesty, is open to debate for it brings to question, among other things, notions of independent will and personal accountability when it comes to the individual's decision to turn violent as well as the exercise of rights (and limits) of freedom of expression in cyberspace. Also, deciding which websites and what kinds of content are "extremist" is a sufficiently subjective affair, varying from country to country and from one individual to another. Further, devising ways of measuring increasing levels of radicalization *and* attributing that increase to having been exposed to extremist materials on the Internet is an entirely different issue altogether.

But this is not what this paper is about. Regardless whether the premise can be supported or refuted, and while convicted terrorists in this part of the world have attested to utilizing the Internet in some ways during their operations, one would be hard pressed to prove the primacy of the Internet in their step up to violence. More often than not, more traditional elements remain the key to individual religious radicalization and political violence in Southeast Asia—blood relations and marriage ties. This paper revisits these kinship linkages as well as quasi-kinship ones that include teacher-disciple bonds and the wider fraternity of *ikhwan*-ship (brotherhood) with particular regard to JI. This could be yet another write-up to add to the ever-

¹ For instance, see Bruce Hoffman, "The Use of the Internet by Islamic Terrorists", Gabriel Weimann's "Online Terrorists Prey on the Vulnerable" and Daveed Gartenstein-Ross' "The Problem of the Lone Wolf Terrorist". The author has also in fact jointly written a piece on Internet radicalization; see RSIS-ASPI joint report on "Countering Internet radicalization in Southeast Asia".

expanding repertoire of literature on terrorism today but hopefully this paper adds some value to the existing body of works because of its primary research component. And as part of policy suggestion, this paper emphasizes the importance of keeping counterterrorism efforts in context or else governments could run the risk of carelessly appropriating vital counterterrorism resources on less immediate concerns.

But first off, it is important to recognize what JI really is as an organization. How did JI come about and how has it evolved into what it is today? And considering what it is today — a greatly fragmented, highly decentralized entity with very fluid membership — how relevant is it to regard JI an organization at all? And if that is the case, what does combating a “non-organization” then mean for counterterrorism for this region?

JI: In context and as is

JI is a clandestine Islamist group with roots deep in the Darul Islam movement of the fifties, an episode in history that has had crucial repercussions for Muslim politics in Indonesia many years down the road. It is, therefore, important to understand Darul Islam to in turn understand JI.

Studying the Darul Islam movement has twin benefits for all students in the terrorism field even remotely interested in looking at Indonesia. For one, its history allows a proper understanding of not just how and why JI came about but also a glimpse of a highly probable future pathway of the group. Two, it helps situate JI within the larger context of identity politics in Indonesia, a Muslim-dominated country with a long history of having Islam appear in various shapes and forms in the public sphere. Religion has at numerous junctures in Indonesia’s history—when fighting the Dutch, at independence and during subsequent phases of nation building—provided a significant, convenient and resounding rallying point around which to mobilize the masses. The politicization of Islam in Indonesia is as “normal” as identity politics gets and it is not at all uncommon for religious identities in contemporary societies to be politicized considering the ever-increasing reach of the state in various aspects of modern day-to-day life. For Indonesia, it is however forlorn that violent religious

groups operating in the fringes of society hog the world's attention, effectively eclipsing the much larger dynamics at play.

The Darul Islam movement was not a particularly religious one to begin with.² It came about largely because local militias who had helped the indigenous authority fight off the colonialists were unhappy over the way the new government went about administering the then freshly minted independent state. Feeling short-changed for having to disband but without receiving what they perceived would be an appropriate share of the resources at the state's disposal, Islam provided the leaders of the movement a common ground for mobilization. What began in 1948 as separate rebellions breaking out in different parts of the country, Darul Islam fought for an Islamic alternative to a secular statehood. Over the years, the movement gave rise to, among other things, a home-grown concept of jihadism and offshoots and splinter groups the likes of Komando Jihad and JI alongside numerous other non-violent ones that all revolve around the want for the establishment of an Islamic state.

Darul Islam, its religious ideology seeped in militancy and its great tales of fearless warriors who would fight against all odds, has proven extremely enduring through the trials of time. Prominent members of the movement continue to be the stuff of legend and a tireless source of inspiration for the jihadists of today.³ The movement has also shown a tremendous ability to survive. It has faced brutal military crackdown during Suharto's New Order regime; it has also gone through numerous intra-group rivalries, split factions, mergers and reconciliations over and above an assortment of splinter groups of different political configurations with different leaders at the helms, all in all demonstrating a kind of dexterity the movement has to not merely adapt but, more importantly, remain appealing through different periods of Indonesian history.

But in being so fluid, the Darul Islam of today with its many manifestations is not like the Darul Islam of past. With nascent beginnings as a coherent organization of

² For backgrounders, see Martin Van Bruinessen, "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in post-Suharto Indonesia" and International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 92, "Recycling militants in Indonesia: Darul Islam and the Australian embassy bombing", 22 February 2005.

³ For example, individuals like Musa Warman whose "achievements" included organizing *fa'i* raids to obtain fund and weapons could very well be controversial but their stories live on; see ICG Report No. 92: "Recycling militants in Indonesia".

networks, Darul Islam has transformed into a network of individuals who forge alliances based on close and very personal ties.

And in very similar fashion, this is what JI is today.

JI was formally inducted in 1993 after friction within Darul Islam resulted in the late Abdullah Sungkar leaving to form a split faction. Conceived from the outset as a military outfit with its own charter, operational guidelines and strategic programmes, as evident from its so-called manifesto called *Pedoman Umum Perjuangan al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah* (General Guide for the Struggle of al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah, or better known by its Indonesian acronym, PUPJI), JI started out as an organization highly centralized and well-structured.⁴ Management was very apparently top-down with a clear hierarchical order; the group operated on various *markaziyah*, *mantiqi* and *wakalah* levels that spanned the region, each with its own spheres of influence and responsibilities.⁵

But after the September 11 attacks, and particularly so after the first Bali bombings, known and suspected members of JI were relentlessly pursued in massive crackdowns across Southeast Asia, leaving many observers to posit that the group has been dismantled and reduced to nothing more than a mere shell of its former self.⁶ The formation of the elite Indonesian counterterrorism force Detachment 88, fine police work and high-level regional cooperation have led to either the capture or death of the group's most notorious members like Riduan Isamuddin a.k.a. Hambali, the Bali bombers and their accomplices, and bomb expert, Azahari Husin.

Yet despite such heavy setbacks, JI continues to be credited for a string of high-profile terrorist attacks across Indonesia over the next years, including the (first) J.W.

⁴ See Elena Pavlova, "From Counter-Society to Counter-State: Jemaah Islamiyah According to PUPJI", IDSS Working Paper No. 117, 14 November 2006.

⁵ Nasir Abas, in a radio interview in 2006, described the workings of the various operational levels. See transcript on Indonesia Matters website; available at <http://www.indonesiamatters.com/104/nasir-abas-on-jamaah-islamiyah/> (page last accessed 21 February 2010).

⁶ This is how JI has been widely described in the media and by various terrorism analysts since the arrest and prosecution of the Bali bombers. For an example among many, see Joshua Kurlantzick, "A radical solution: Using former terrorists to turn around militants in the making is showing remarkable success", Los Angeles Times, 6 January 2008; available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jan/06/opinion/op-kurlantzick6> (page last accessed 21 February 2010).

Marriott Hotel bombing of 2003, the Australian embassy bombing of 2004, and the (second) Bali bombings of 2005. Through attacks on what are regarded symbols of a corrupt, capitalist West encroachment and moral decadence—luxury hotels and bars and pubs—JI seems set on course to establish a pan-Islamic state by way of violence and fear.

But speaking of the JI today as if it were an organizationally cohesive entity, something one could understandably expect any fringe group to be, is yet misinformed and lacks appreciation of its extremely amorphous nature. For one, the violent elements are truly the fringe of a fringe. The Bali bombings of 2002, for instance, caused major internal debates within the group, some of which played out publicly in the media. Even firebrand Indonesian cleric, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, widely tagged one of the founders of JI, registered his lack of concurrence with the way the Bali trio had chosen to carry out their act of jihad⁷ as well as expressed sympathy for those who were killed in the suicide bombings.⁸

Further, an even closer examination of JI's violent sliver reveals that they hardly share ideological unity of strategic means even if they do so in goal, as will be evident later in the paper in the case of Ali Imron who is currently in detention for his involvement in the terrorist attack in Bali. So while these individuals shore up an Islamist ideology fixated on installing the laws of *syariah* in the public domain largely by picking up arms, they believe in greatly divergent ways of doing so. Different JI militants wage categorically different "jihad" — some wage a global one where the entire world is a justifiable battlefield while others would only fight in localized conflicts where other Muslims are involved — and this has significant bearings on how they conceptualize what makes a legitimate fight and which operations they ultimately participate in.⁹

Also, while some choose to keep their allegiance out of open scrutiny to remain underground and confine themselves to their small exclusivist communities, some

⁷ "Teror dan Persepsi Abu Bakar Ba'asyir", inilah.com, 23 July 2009; available at <http://www.inilah.com/news/read/politik/2009/07/23/132177/teror-dan-persepsi-abubakar-baasyir/> (page last accessed 23 February 2010).

⁸ "Abu Bakar Ba'asyir Bersimpatik pada Korban Bom Bali", TEMPO Interaktif, 13 December 2002; available at <http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/nasional/2002/12/13/brk,20021213-16,id.html> (page last accessed 23 February 2010).

⁹ Sulastri Osman, working MSc thesis.

others go public with their commitment to above-board assemblages the likes of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) and Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT) led by Abu Jibril and Ba'asyir respectively. Regardless of their associations, or none, they have all nevertheless been linked back to JI.

The messiness of the configuration is further compounded by repeated denials of alleged group members that JI exists at all. Ba'asyir has time and again rebuffed the existence of such an organization, instead crediting its invention to the enemies of Islam — among others, the CIA — who seek to tarnish the good name of the religion and its followers in order to justify repressive actions against them.¹⁰ Also, while Ali Imron has indeed claimed to be part of a '*jemaah Islamiyah*', he meant the term in its most generic application, regarding himself as being in *the* one congregation of Islam and altogether denying it being an exclusive organization.¹¹ Coining an outfit made synonymous with terrorism with an all-encompassing moniker that can literally be as expansive as to include the entire Islamic community renders the attempt to delineate an actual organization not merely a tedious task but a politically thorny one too in Muslim-dominated Indonesia. This only further muddies the conceptualizing of a JI organization.

The (non-)organization that is JI

What makes JI, or who is part of JI, are often posed questions. But perhaps what's more important to ask is how relevant is the concept of a JI organization when its reported members seem to hardly recognize one?

The need for a clearly bounded group no doubt makes it easier for law enforcers and policymakers alike to set their sights and course of action against a particular target, to easier identify irrefutable members, to calculate group strength, and to basically imagine the enemy.

¹⁰ "Abu Bakar Ba'asyir Bersimpatik pada Korban Bom Bali", TEMPO Interaktif, 13 December 2002.

¹¹ "Ali Imron: Ba'asyir Tidak Terkait Bom Bali", TEMPO Interaktif, 20 January 2005; available at <http://www.tempo.co.id/hg/nasional/2005/01/20/brk.20050120-20.id.html> (page last accessed 23 February 2010).

But when interviewed during a series of fieldwork in Indonesia last year, a number of convicted Islamist militants who have been variously charged with terrorist activities by the Indonesian government hardly spoke of a JI organization. Some in fact claimed to only know of JI when they read of themselves or their compatriots in the news. Many were more content to speak of their roles in operations as individuals, or at most, their roles in relation to their immediate network of compatriots.

Sonhadi, for instance, the current leader of the Ba'asyir-led JAT in East Java who had served time for helping the late terrorist fugitive Noordin Top when the latter was on the run, kept reiterating that he had acted not in the name of an entity called JI but out of a personal duty to a fellow Muslim who had a run-in with the law and was trying to evade authorities. Sonhadi, unaware of Top's true identity then, had only needed to know that the police were after Top for having done something the latter believed to be for the sake of Islam.¹²

And for Yusuf, a militant who once trained under Nasir Abas in Mindanao and was later arrested in Semarang for possession of illegal arms, what was real for him was not as much the group as the cause and the fellow militants he had fought alongside in southern Philippines. He did not find himself in a *medan jihad* (jihad battlefield) because he had sworn an oath of allegiance to a group of elders—he never did—but because he was committed to helping his Muslim brothers he believed were under prosecution. Further, Yusuf claimed that his loyalty to the cause and to his comrades was only applicable to the battlefield in Mindanao and no more, highlighting a lack of consistent positive self-identification to the group.¹³

JI, it seems, cannot be sufficiently understood in terms of any standard organization because, as Sonhadi and Yusuf go to show, those who have been associated with JI do not exactly view themselves as members of such a grouping. It is true that the elders did at the start put in order a kind of group arrangement that can only be considered a networked form of organization with different cells operating at different levels which left members largely unaware of others beyond their own jurisdictions; but that was more the result of intentional, masterful planning than inadvertent internal

¹² Interview, 17 June 2009.

¹³ Interview, 14 March 2009.

fragmentation. Today, JI arguably neither has easily identifiable members united in means and goals nor a structured system with a discernible hierarchical order.

Nevertheless, there is a sort of organizational arrangement among its known members and it is one largely based on kinship and quasi-kinship linkages. Kinship ties include blood and marriage relations;¹⁴ quasi-kinship ones include bonds between extremist religious teachers and their students which should not be underestimated because they are not unlike a familial one wherein the latter's loyalty and obedience to the former is paramount. On top of that, relations also extend into the realm of fictive kinship where everyone is an *ikhwan*.¹⁵

The following sections examine the various kinship and quasi-kinship linkages evident among known JI terrorist militants.

A family affair: Kinships in JI

JI is made up of a complex web of familial relationships and marriage ties. An inherent sense of belonging being part of a family forges bonds among its members that are imaginably stronger than most other kinds of social organizations can foster. Further, keeping activities, especially those of the illegal kind, within the family helps keep clandestine operations safe from infiltration because only the close, familiar and trusted find themselves invited to partake in them. Loyalty is therefore almost always assured because the individual's allegiance is not simply to just any collective given that turning against each other necessarily means turning against the people closest to them.

For the most part, families can be expected to provide the unconditional support and protection needed by terrorist militants when they involve themselves in high-risk

¹⁴ The examining of kinship ties within JI is not unprecedented; among the most notable works are investigative pieces by Noor Huda Ismail, Sidney Jones and the ICG, and Sally White.

¹⁵ Marc Sageman, in *Understanding Terror Networks* (2004), noted the significance of closed societies in facilitating a "bunch of guys" in the West to turn to violence; and based on the research, in a New Yorker piece by Raffi Khatchadourian, Sageman described emotional attachment to group members, perceived social benefits of remaining in the group and "one-upmanship" as part of the radicalization process towards violence. Also, Scott Atran, based on psychological studies, highlighted the institutional factor behind the organizing of fictive kin to help explain suicide terrorism behaviour in the Middle East and beyond: see "Genesis of Suicide Terrorism", *Science Review* Vol. 299.

endeavours. There have been numerous instances of family members of terrorist militants willingly putting themselves at risk in order to keep their renegade kin safe, whether it is by way of giving refuge, withholding information from the authorities or simply banding together as the examples to follow show.

Blood relations

The October 2002 Bali bombings saw a family of brothers pooling strength. Ali Ghufron, a.k.a. Mukhlas, and Amrozi, both executed in November 2008 for the attack, were brothers. Ali Imron, brother number three, is currently serving a life sentence in a Jakarta detention centre for his role in the same operation. The significance of blood relations is especially telling in this particular case of terrorism because Imron, by his own admission, had always felt that bombing Bali was the wrong way of going about the struggle for Islam even if he did play a central role in the planning of the attack. He had been the one who surveyed the sites and identified the bomb targets as well as drove the explosive-laden van to position it nearer to the attack location because the suicide bomber did not know how to drive. Imron recalls having advised Mukhlas, the master planner and financier, on several occasions against carrying on with the operation but Imron nevertheless continued with his assigned duties because Mukhlas was, after all, still his brother.¹⁶

Also keeping it together is Farihin Ahmad and his family. Three generations of Islamist militants run in the family.¹⁷ Farihin claims during an interview that his father and grandfather waged armed jihad against the governing authorities of their times. His father, Ahmad Kandai, a member of Darul Islam, was in fact involved in the 1957 plot to assassinate then-president Sukarno, whereas his uncle, Nasir, had worked closely with both Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in the 1980s and 1990s. Following in family tradition, Farihin and his third brother, Mohammed Islam, had travelled to Poso to join in the violent clashes against the Christians there at the height of communal violence in Central Sulawesi. Farihin was also involved in the bomb

¹⁶ Interview, 17 April 2009.

¹⁷ Many of those involved in JI today have had relatives involved in the Darul Islam movement of yesteryears. For further understanding of JI's history, see Greg Fealy, "Half a century of violent jihad in Indonesia: a historical and ideological comparison of Darul Islam and Jemaah Islamiah", in Vicziany and Wright-Neville (eds.), *Islamic terrorism in Indonesia: Myths and realities*, Series: Annual Indonesia Lecture, no. 26 (Monash Asia Institute) 2005.

attack against the Philippine ambassador in Jakarta in 2000 together with his other brother, Abdul Jabar. Youngest brother, Solahudin, was involved in a series of bombings in Indonesia, including the bombing of the Atrium shopping mall in 2001. The fact that all of the brothers have accordingly served time in prison for their various actions has not deterred Farihin from preaching to his own children the necessity of armed jihad. Farihin hopes his children, including his daughters, will follow his footsteps and continue to fight for the cause the way he and his family have.¹⁸

And in last year's terrorist attack in Jakarta, family ties among the perpetrators were similarly evident. Syaifudin Zuhri Djaelani, the recruiter of the suicide bombers who blew themselves up in the twin luxury hotel attacks in July 2009, had his brother, Mohamed Syahir, as his closest aide. Together they assumed various identities as they travelled to different Indonesian cities recruiting new potentials into their fold up until they were shot to death during a police raid on their safe house in Tangerang in October. The manhunt could perhaps have ended earlier if not for Fajar Firdaus, a psychology graduate from a local university, who helped rent the safe house for them. He was their nephew.

Marriage ties

Kinships within JI are further extended through marriage ties. The director of the Institute of International Peace Building in Jakarta, Noor Huda Ismail, who counts a good number of the terrorist militants his friends having gone to school with some of them, explained that JI elders would play matchmaker to the younger ones by fixing them up with their sisters, daughters or other female relatives, or those of their peers.¹⁹ According to Noor Huda, "once inside these [extremist] groups, individuals cement their mutual bonds by marrying the sisters and daughters of other members.

¹⁸ Interview, 15 March 2009

¹⁹ Noor Huda Ismail, "Familial Kinship Among Islamists"; personal collection, available at <http://noorhudaismail.blogspot.com/2005/11/familial-kinship-among-islamists.html> (page last accessed 10 November 2009).

Therefore, it is difficult for an individual to move away from the groups without betraying their closest friends and family.”²⁰

Such arranged marriages, like the strategic union between Mukhlas, the Afghan veteran from East Java who would later become the mastermind behind the Bali bombings, and Paridah Abas, the daughter from a family of jihadists based in Malaysia, for instance, help to expand the network in a most secure way. With this particular nuptial agreement, close associates of both Sungkar and Ba’asyir from Indonesia and neighbouring Malaysia effectively become one familial unit. The Abas family, like Mukhlas’ own, has its own share of Islamist militants: Nasir Abas, Paridah’s brother who is also an Afghan veteran, trained militants from a base camp in Mindanao while other brother Hashim Abas was reportedly involved in a bomb plot in Singapore.²¹

Another such marital pact highlights the JI tactic of matrimonial mergers for protection. Ari Aryani, wife number three of Noordin Top, the now-dead terrorist fugitive suspected to be the mastermind behind the Jakarta twin hotel bombings, is the daughter of one of Top’s close associates, Bahrudin Latif. A police raid on Bahrudin’s house in light of the July bombings led to the discovery of explosives buried in the backyard. Bahrudin, who was arrested later in December 2009, was the head of the Al-Muaddib pesantren in Cilacap and is suspected of helping to hide Top from the authorities to the extent of providing him a whole new identity as his daughter’s husband.²² According to local press reports, it was apparent that Bahrudin did not disclose to his daughter her husband’s real identity when he arranged for them to be married; she had only known Top as a particular Abdul Halim.²³ Top’s previous two wives, one in Riau and one in Surabaya, were also reported to have been related to

²⁰ “The Many Wives of Jakarta Bomb Suspect Noordin M Top”, *The Jakarta Globe*, 31 July 2009; available at <http://thejakartaglobe.com/home/the-many-wives-of-jakarta-bomb-suspect-noordin-m-top/321319> (page last accessed 11 November 2009).

²¹ For a backgrounder on Hashim Abas, see John Burton and Roel Landingin’s “Plot to blow up four embassies revealed on Afghan video”, *FT Special Report*, 19 February 2002, available at <http://specials.ft.com/attackonterrorism/FT30PCRPYXC.html> (page last accessed 19 November 2009).

²² “Baridin ditangkap, Warga Pasuruhan Cilacap Lega”, *tvOne*, 24 December 2009; available at http://hukum.tvone.co.id/berita/view/30537/2009/12/24/baridin_ditangkap_warga_pasuruhan_cilacap_1_ega/ (page last accessed 23 February 2010).

²³ For example, see Sumarwoto, “Warga Sekampung Bahrudin Latif Diliputi Keresahan”, *Finroll News*, 21 July 2009; available at http://news.id.finroll.com/articles/105908-warga-sekampung-bahrudin-latif-diliputi-keresahan-oleh-sumarwoto_.html (page last accessed 13 November 2009).

and have had their marriages arranged by the relatives of his previous accomplices.²⁴ That said, Top's wives are however not necessarily mere victims of their fathers' or their other male relatives' jihadist cause because, as Sally White points out, independent agency should never be overlooked as reality on the ground is usually far more complex than how the media chooses to portray such women.²⁵

Expanding the concept: Quasi-kinships in JI

Blood and marriage are not the only kinds of binding kin ties among JI members. While being genealogically related of course matters in kinship, notions of relatedness are just as significant in bringing together a group of people who think, feel and act alike. However, when speaking of a sense of perceived relatedness among a collective, there is a danger of clumsy categorizing because everyone can essentially relate to one another on many different levels and have social relationships with one another as, among other things, friends, neighbours, classmates or colleagues.²⁶ That said, relatedness when it comes to JI is rather closely associated to actual kinships in terms of name and function, something which helps to further buttress the in-group understanding of an "us" versus "them".²⁷

Discipleship

A form of relationship evident in JI that is not so dissimilar from an authoritative father figure is one held by charismatic religious elders. These include figures like the *guru ngaji* (Quran recital teacher) and traditional medicinal men who might not have formal education but who, having usually committed the Quran and Hadith to memory, garner much respect. The great significance of these religious elders in many Muslim societies across Indonesia, though not a novel observation, has however not

²⁴ "The Many Wives of Jakarta Bomb Suspect Noordin M Top", *The Jakarta Globe*.

²⁵ Sally White, "The Wives of Noordin Top", *Inside Indonesia*, Oct–Dec 2009; available at <http://insideindonesia.org/content/view/1254/47/> (page last accessed 25 November 2009).

²⁶ See Ladislav Holy, "Universality of Kinship and the Current Practice of Kinship Studies", pp. 143–173, *Anthropological Perspectives on Kinship*, Pluto Press, 1996.

²⁷ In applying social psychologist Geert Hofstede's work on culture to his Radical Pathways Framework, which helps explain why individuals turn to violence, Kumar Ramakrishna in his book *Radical Pathways* (2009) highlights a pattern of strong dependence on group elders in collectivist, large power-distant groups much like JI as well as showcases how teachers actively shape the intellectual futures of children in such groups.

been much appreciated as a form of kinship whose bonds are just as strong as any blood or marriage ties. Religious elders, who by their own accords take it as their *amanah* (trusteeship) to educate those in their charge about Islam and Islamic ways of living, are on the flipside often entrusted with the religious education of the children; and with religion being an all-encompassing force in everyday life, they essentially have far-reaching influence over most aspect of day-to-day life.²⁸ So in their roles as educators and healers, spiritual or otherwise, it is not uncommon that they in effect come to be regarded as extensions of the heads of household.

Even in a time of advanced communications technology and the democratization of ways to attain religious knowledge with the mass print media and the Internet, the sway of such religious elders has not been significantly undermined. The centrality of religious figures—extremist ones in this particular case—in various militant and terrorist operations in Indonesia showcases the lasting influence of charismatic individuals over their disciples. Samudra, the Bali bomber whose real name was Abdul Aziz, had deliberately chosen to attach the title of *imam* to his name, no doubt to create the impression that he possessed legitimate religious authority for his actions. He is said to have used the dubious appellation of religious leader especially after he participated in a series of bomb attacks in Batam in 2000.²⁹ Similarly, Syaifudin Zuhri, the patient recruiter of suicide bombers, was reported in the local press to have assumed the role of an *ustadz* as well as an *ahli bekam* (traditional medicinal cupping practitioner) as he worked to get closer to his potential targets in the lead up to the July 2009 twin hotel bombings in Jakarta.³⁰ Both the suicide bombers involved in the attacks had been his students.

²⁸ The importance of religious elders in Indonesian Muslim communities is very evident in numerous chapters throughout Greg Fealy and Sally White (Eds.), *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore), 2008.

²⁹ See “*Selain Kasus Bali, Imam Samudra Hanya Mengakui Terlibat Bom Batam*”, *Tempo*, 11 December 2002; available at <http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/nasional/2002/12/11/brk,20021211-18.id.html>. Also see a fan review of Imam Samudra’s jailhouse memoir, *Aku Melawan Teroris*, from 4 November 2008; available at <http://prisonerofjoy.blogspot.com/2008/11/imam-samudera-not-even-drop-of-muslim.html> (both pages last accessed 19 November 2009).

³⁰ See “*Membidik Saefuddin M. Top*”, *Tempo*, 14 August 2009, available at <http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/flashgrafis/2009/08/14/grf,20090814-202.id.html>; and “*Densus Evakuasi Warga Dengan Pengeras Suara*”, *Viva News*, 9 October 2009, available at <http://nasional.vivanews.com/news/read/95871-densus-evakuasi-warga-dengan-pengeras-suara> (both pages last accessed 19 November 2009).

Fraternity of ikhwan

Members of JI subscribe to living by Islamic laws and principles in small groups of *usroh*, a term that literally means family but is meant in practice to be understood as the foundations for building up an Islamic society.³¹ In such an *usroh*, every man within the network is an *ikhwan* (“brother” in Arabic), highlighting the perceived kindred relations among members of the group. Indonesians in general do refer to one another using similarly familial references like *bapak* (father) and *ibu* (mother), so the fact that JI members call one another a brother equivalent is nothing much remarkable in itself. That said, the adoption of an Arabic term to showcase a sense of camaraderie among them is nevertheless a deliberate exercise to show solidarity and set themselves quite apart from the other Muslims in Indonesia. Further, this greatly-limited brotherhood becomes reinforced by the amalgamation of their unique in-group language and appearances. The jihadists pepper their everyday communications with Arabic, possess their own group speak, sport beards and don “jihadist” garbs that usually consist of a baggy top and a matching pair of pants that ends above the ankles, calculated to create a very visibly exclusivist identity for themselves.

This assumed fraternity often means fluid memberships despite personal differences in opinions or preferred leadership styles. Many who subscribe to the same jihadist ideology identify with one another and some will cooperate in operations if called upon regardless if they belong to different circles.³²

Kinship and quasi-kinship ties and their significance for counterterrorism

Pointing out kinship linkages within JI is not unprecedented; the significance of kinship in JI has been well documented. Familial relationships among the perpetrators of terrorist acts are, in fact, oftentimes rather quickly discernible with some probing. What this paper seeks to do is emphasize the importance of understanding and appreciating these familial ties, regardless if they are real or imagined, amidst anxious

³¹ This is based on a concept developed by Hasan al-Banna of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, a group JI has found inspiration in. A translation of al-Banna’s writings (in Malay) published by Dewan Pustaka Fajar can be accessed from http://www.muslimdiary.com/downloads/usrah_dan_dawah-Hasan%20al-Banna.pdf.

³² As noted in ICG Report No. 92: “Recycling militants in Indonesia”.

talk of “self-radicalization” and lone-wolf terrorists in Southeast Asia. There is no doubt some logic in connecting the dots between extremist ideology derived from reading extremist books or downloading extremist materials from the Internet and violent terrorist acts—but actually proving the causal relationship is another matter altogether.

Traditional and direct real-time relationships seem to remain the foremost influencing factor when it comes to religious radicalization and extremist violence among JI members. Kinship and quasi-kinship networks tied together by blood, marriage, discipleship and fraternity seem to supersede personal impulses of the individual lone wolf when it comes to carrying out a terrorist operation. Evidently, a reliable support network made up of familiar faces and trusted individuals are prerequisites.

But of course, it is obvious that not every kin, or quasi-kin, belonging to the same familial unit as a known terrorist militant is also a violent extremist, even a potential one. Despite the present chosen focus on kinship, there should be no misunderstanding that all related individuals are necessarily guilty by association, or that they should be assumed to be so. Indeed, the authorities should as much as possible steer clear of jumping the gun because excessive harassment from law enforcers, whether real or perceived, could likely result in defensive reactions and only serve to harden those who could already be hesitant to inform on family members or turn away those who sympathize with the terrorist militant. Good police work is therefore crucial in such cases, as is sound intelligence.

And intelligence is definitely key when it comes to identifying suspected members of a terrorist network without creating much political ruckus, especially so in multi-cultural, multi-religious societies like Singapore. The central issue that should accordingly feature at the forefront of efforts to identify suspected terrorists is the question of threat: what’s more imminent, the extremist ideology or the violent extremist? The problem for the authorities always lies in recognizing whom to target, the person who espouses extremist views or specifically those who actually engage in violent acts? Because is it not the former that is the pre-cursor to the latter? But who can really say that a particular individual’s extremist views would beyond doubt manifest in violence? And if that is the case—which it is not—does it mean that in

addition to nabbing the violent individual, extremist literature in all its myriad forms made available from all possible sources, including the Internet, has to be plugged too? Who decides what constitutes “extremist”? These are tricky questions.

Countering terrorists, at least for law enforcers, should be everything about stopping extremist acts of violence since that is well within the jurisdiction of the police and less about curbing extremist ideas which is more a whole-of-society concern, especially that of the wider Muslim community—but this is, however, an issue that can only be sufficiently addressed in an entirely new paper. The point here is that it is important to keep counterterrorism efforts in context or else run the risk of appropriating vital resources to less pertinent endeavours. “Self-radicalization” and lone-wolf terrorists, at least for now and at least for this region, remain less the worry than individuals with actual real-life connections to known violent extremists.

It is difficult policing violent extremists and those suspected of being involved with them, especially in light of the potential for political fallout. A delicate carrot-and-stick balance between punishment and rehabilitation has to be struck when dealing with those captured because on one hand, justice has to be perceived to be served in the eyes of those adversely affected by terrorism. And on the other hand, the judgements passed onto the terrorist militants have to be similarly recognized by their immediate families as appropriately “fair enough” for the crimes committed. This tacit acknowledgement by the kin is crucial; families could otherwise continue to harbour deep-seated resentment towards the governing authorities for what they perceive to be unjust treatment towards their “kind”, bitterness that could be passed from one generation to the next. Psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan, in a research piece on identity and collective trauma in Cyprus, noted how groups who have been systematically discriminated against or victimized in wars or war-like conditions by the (usually larger) oppressive enemy group tend to feel a sense of shame and humiliation as well as guilt for surviving an ordeal others they knew died in; and the lack of ability or opportunity for them to adequately come to terms with such sentiments result in the trans-generational transmission of trauma.³³ Carrying the

³³ Vamik D. Volkan, “Trauma, Identity and Search for a Solution in Cyprus”, *Insight Turkey* Vol. 10 No. 4, 2008; available at <http://www.vamikvolkan.com/History-of-Cyprus.php> (page last accessed 2 March 2010).

same emotional burden, the younger generations, to varying degrees, then attempt to continue the efforts of their parents to reverse the humiliation and complete the mourning. Likewise, the current “war-like” situation between JI members and governing authorities serve to reinforce perceptions of outright discrimination and victimization among jihadists and their families, a kind of humiliation the younger generations seek to rectify with some seeing political violence as a way to contribute to the unfinished tasks of their predecessors. There are numerous examples of this to go by. Like the case of Farihin’s family goes to show, many of today’s JI members in Indonesia have fathers, grandfathers and other relatives who were once part of the anti-government Darul Islam movement of the 50s.

The Indonesian police, taking the lead from its elite counterterrorism force Detachment 88, seem to have taken away lessons from this. Accordingly, families of captured or killed JI terrorist militants often receive assistance from the governing authorities. In part to help keep the affected families on their feet especially if the captured or killed was a breadwinner, and in part to show that they have not been ostracized or discriminated against for the actions of one member, the police recognize that kin have an impact on the overall success of their counterterrorism efforts. By demonstrating to such families through aid, financial or otherwise, that the government and its apparatus are really not their enemy, it helps reduce possible resentment for the authorities to a low, ultimately stifling the flames that could fan a new generation of violent extremists.

Singapore has also established similar practices, highlighting how integral garnering support from kin is to the effective stemming of extremism in future generations. The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), made up of independent religious scholars and counsellors, was set up in 2003 with the specific aim of countering the ideology of JI. Today, it not merely counsels and rehabilitates those detained for being involved with the group but the wives and children of the detainees too, well in recognition of the tendency for extremist ideologies to play out in vicious cycles within the family. Among other things, the RRG counsellors visit the families at their homes, offer financial support and upgrading courses and extend educational

assistance for the children so that they can better cope with the detention of one of their own, emotionally, socially and economically.³⁴

Effective counterterrorism, among other things, means being fully aware of the significance of kinship and quasi-kinship ties among JI members. Of course, not everyone who can be possibly linked to the group is necessarily a violent extremist. But for the few who decide to partake in terrorist acts, they turn to their kin, real or imagined, for support, protection and refuge. Law enforcers should therefore similarly engage the kin to prevent them from doing exactly that.

³⁴ For further information on the RRG, see its official website <http://www.rrg.sg/>. The counter-ideological work of the RRG has been variously described as a success but, as Kumar Ramakrishna in a critique of the approach puts it, the programme's full potential has yet to be realized; see "A Holistic Critique of Singapore's Counter-Ideological Program", *CTC Sentinel* Vol. 2 Issue 1, January 2009.

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