# Ideology and identity transformation in the deradicalization of Muslim extremists in Indonesia[1]

**Suratno**
University of Paramadina, Indonesia
E-mail: suratno@paramadina.ac.id

**Abstract**

This article used a biographical approach to follow the lives of former Muslim extremists in examining individual deradicalization from the actors' perspective. The results of the extremists' deradicalization were examined using theories of Salafi ideology and identity transformation. Deradicalization marks a period of transformation - a process of taking a new ideology and identity and initiating a new power. The doers adopt a new jihad ideology after being influenced by a colorful interpretation of jihad. The deradicalization also shifts from the Salafi *jihadi/irhabi* to the Salafi Purist, or from a violent to a less-violent jihad. They continue to support violent jihad but restrict how its principles are used. Few extremists decide to engage in moderate or non-violent jihad on their own initiative and without the influence of others. In conclusion, deradicalization does not ensure their eradication. It implies a certain amount of transformation into a new identity, which has profound short- and long-term effects. The first demonstrates that former Muslim extremists who still identify as jihadists, adhere to their ideology, and engage in a variety of jihad-related activities. The deradicalization of the extremists will be more challenging the more in-depth the knowledge and experience of violent jihad. On the other hand, the latter is dedicated to leaving the violent jihad group and ending recidivism.

[1] Several parts of this article are taken from Suratno, 2016, Transformation of Jihad: Deradicalization and Disengagement of Muslim Extremist in Contemporary Indonesia, A doctoral thesis at the Institute of Anthropology, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany.

Artikel ini membahas tentang idiologi dan transformasi identitas pada deradikalisasi ekstrimis muslim di Indonesia. Teori tentang idiologi dan identitas Salafi dan transformasi identitas akan digunakan untuk menjelaskan apa yang dimaksud deradikalisasi ektrimis muslim. Deradikalisasi menandai transformasi ekstrimis muslim: sebuah proses mengambil ideologi dan identitas baru dan menginisiasi kekuasaan baru. Mereka dipengaruhi oleh interpretasi jihad yang beragam, kemudian memilih ideologi jihad yang baru. Ideologi ekstrimis awalnya bertitik tolak pada Salafi jihadi/irhabi kepada Salafi murni atau dari jihad dengan kekerasan menuju ke jihad lunak. Mereka masih gandrung pada jihad dengan kekerasan namun membatasi pada aturan penerapannya. Hanya sedikit ekstrimis yang berpindah ke jihad yang moderat atau jihad lunak sebagai akibat dari refleksi diri dan bujukan dari dalam. Simpulannya deradikalisasi tidak menjamin potensi ekstrimis agama yang tidak akan lama lagi ada. Ekstrimis terdahulu akan tetap ada sebagai jihadis, mereka mengubah keyakinan mereka sesuai situasi dan kondisi yang memaksa mereka untuk meyakini bahwa melanjutkan kekerasan itu dibenarkan. Akhirnya, deradikalisasi bermakna transformasi menuju identitas baru, yang memiliki dampak jangka panjang yang signifikan dan cepat. Yang pertama menunjukkan bahwa ekstrimis muslim terus berjihad dan menyebut diri mereka sebagai jihadis, memegang teguh paham jihad dan melibatkan diri pada kegiatan yang berbeda-beda. Semakin dalam pengetahuan dan pengalaman tentang kekerasan jihad, semakin sulit untuk melakukan deradikalisasi. Sebaliknya, yang terakhir menunjukkan komitmen ekstrimis untuk menjauh dari paham residivis dan keluar dari kelompok jihad dengan kekerasan.

**Keywords**: *Deradicalization, Ideology, Identity transformation, Non-violent jihad, Islamic extremism.*

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## Introduction

According to Ashour (2009), deradicalization is a process of relative change in which a person or extremist group repudiates its radical ideology and radical behavior to give up and delegitimize using violence. It aims to achieve its goals while also incorporating social, political, and economic changes within a pluralist society. Ashour (2009) explains that deradicalization can either transform

ideology or behavior away from radicalism. The first results from a change in beliefs, whereas the latter is in actions.

A literature review shows that there has been significant work on deradicalization. However, regarding the study of both radicalization (and deradicalization), Adnan (2007) encouraged avoiding two approaches that betray mono-causal arguments and those with an imbalanced focus. Many works apply an approach that reduces the causes of extremism and terrorism to a few overriding factors. Thus, some researchers claim that Muslim extremist activities are encouraged mainly by ideology and religious, political, and economic zealotry. For instance, Hassan and Ramakrishna emphasize Islamism's role in motivating suicide bombers. This argument was rejected by Pape (2005) who argued that the underlying motivation for suicide attacks is an attempt to remove foreign troops from the homeland, or overthrow governments installed by a foreign power. Barton (2005) and Sageman (2004) conclude that family networks and friendships are the most important factors in the spread of extremist activities. Post (1990) has resorted to psychological arguments (Adnan, 2008).

Similarly, approaches that betray the complexity of the subject with mono-causal arguments and imbalanced focus have also been applied to the study of deradicalization. For instance, Garfinkel (2007) concludes that deradicalization can be as much of a spiritual experience, similar to a religious conversion, as the initial radicalization may have been. One similarity in deradicalization was the traumatic experience preceding the decision to deradicalize, marked by events precipitating the transformation of individual beliefs. Those who turned away from extremist ideology will find a perceived failure of their previous beliefs, similar to their deradicalization experience.

Besides internal factors in deradicalization, there are also external factors. Abuza (2009) concludes that the process of deradicalization is driven by social behavior; will former extremists be incorporated into society, or will they be seen as an outcast? (Abuza, 2009). Juergensmeyer (2001) states that leaving an

ideologically-based extremist group may not be the same as leaving a non-ideological group such as a gang. His study concludes that although religion alone does not lead to violence, in many cases it provides the ideological foundation, motivation, and organizational structure of extremists group and fosters their cohesion. Leaving a Muslim extremist group implies a rejection of the group's ideology. The articulation from religious authorities for denouncing violence could be an important factor in catalyzing the decision to deradicalization (Juergensmeyer, 2000). A search for a new identity and the reward of belonging have also been identified as a major influence that motivates extremist behavior and encourages to continue participation such as in the historical case studies of Red Brigades by Jameson (1990), Baader-Menhof group by Post (1987) and Irish Republican Army/IRA by O'Calaghan (1998). Those studies show internal and external pressures (either to stay or to leave), focusing on psychological pressures and spiraling beliefs that keep a member up with the group.

Although there is recently extensive literature available on Muslim extremism in the Indonesian context, the perpetrators have little been studied. According to Feally & Borgu (2005), the majority of published works fall into one of two categories: (1) works written by experts and journalists with a limited background in Indonesian or Islamic studies who deal with intelligence documents and briefings, and (2) works by experts based on in-country, on-the-ground research. The first is the largest and they include figures such as Gunaratna (2000), Abuza (2003), and Ressa (2003). In contrast, Sidney Jones and the ICG (International Crisis Group) dominate the latter category (Fealy & Borgu, 2005).

In addition, academic researches on deradicalization in the Indonesian context also show a lack of interest in the motivation of individual extremists and pay more attention to organizations by focusing on deradicalization programs such as studies by Pendelton (2008), Johnston (2009), Golose (2009), and ICG (2007). Recent literature on Indonesian deradicalization, therefore, has a

limitation in understanding extremist's life stories except for studies by Adnan (2008) about the life story of Ali Imron and by Azca (2011) about the situation and networks of the post-jihad periods.

Based on the above explanations, there are opportunities to explore what deradicalization encompasses (as studied by Adnan & Azca) and what deradicalization means for the extremist and how it has emerged in different contexts and applied to different groups. This article will explore individual deradicalization in different contexts and groups to fill the gap. It focuses mainly on the transformative process of violent jihad activism from the actors' perspectives. As an anthropological study, it will apply cultural approaches by using the life stories of several Muslim extremists. I will look at the experience of Indonesian deradicalized extremists such as those from JI (Jemaah Islamiyah), LJ (Laskar Jihad), and NII (Negara Islam Indonesia). Therefore, this article will try to answer the following primary question: What happens and reveals after the deradicalization of Muslim extremists in Indonesia regarding their violent jihad ideology and their identity as a jihadist?

## Extremist ideology: between salafi purist, political/siyasi and irhabi/jihadi

Regarding the religious-ideological approach, previous research from ICG (2004), Wiktorowikz (2006), Hasan (2007), and Wahid (2014) clearly explained the differences between Salafi Purist, Salafi Siyasi/Politico and Salafi Irhabi/Jihadi). They posed those differences on 4 key issues in which the salafi Siyasi is positioned in-between Salafi Purist and Salafi Irhabi. Those issues include; (1) Whether it is permissible to the coup against a Muslim government: Salafi Purists say not, but Salafi Irhabi say yes, (2) About organization; Salafi Siyasi and Salafi Irhabi recognize that in order to achieve their political goal they need a level or organization that to Salafi Purist "smack of party-ism", (3) About jihad; Salafi Purist tends to define the concept of jihad in broad terms as the taking of

whatever actions are necessary to improve one's own faith, Salafi Irhabi defines the concept of jihad as a battle, and (4) Those three types of Salafi differ on tactic and methodology for achieving their aims, particularly concerning jihad.

The work of Wiktorowicz (2006) has been instrumental in the study of Salafism, the branch of Islam whose members claim that they try to emulate the Prophet Muhammad and the pious predecessors (*al-Salaf al-Salih*). They are often associated with the first three Moslem generations in Islamic history. In his piece titled "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," published in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* in 2006, Wiktorowicz deals with several aspects of Salafism, including the division of Salafis into Salafi Purists, Salafi Siyasi, and Salafi Irhabi. Wiktorowicz explains that those three Salafis are united by a common religious doctrine that revolves around strict membership to the concept of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and neglect of functions of human reason, logic, and desire. Those divisions strictly obey the rules and guidance in the Quran and Sunna (path or example of the Prophet Muhammad). Even though they claim this religious opinion, it must be highlighted that they have emerged as a result of the inherently subjective nature of implementing religion to new problems and contexts. Consequently, although those divisions somehow have similar opinions they often hold different interpretations, especially about contemporary politics and how to respond to it.

Wiktorowicz (2006) explains in detail what the particular Salafi faction means and with whom (individual and group) those particular Salafi factions are referred. The first is Salafi Purists. They focus on the non-violent strategy of purification through propagation (*dakwah*) and education (*tarbiyah*). They claim that politics is a diversion that possibly leads to deviancy, thus they focus mainly on maintaining and spreading the purity of Islam as mentioned in the Quran, the Prophet Sunna, and the consensus of the Companions. Salafi Purist does not encourage any kind of violent activism, even under repressions and consequently, they tend to be politically quietist. They disagree with political and even violent

oppositions as religious innovation without precedent in the prophetic model and consensus of the Companions. Wiktorowicz further explains that Salafi Purist refers to ulama figures such as Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani (d. 1999), Abdul Aziz bin Baz (d. 1999), Muhammad Salih al-Uthaymin (d. 2001), Rabi Hadi al-Madkhali, etc.

The second is **s**alafi Siyasi/Politico. They focus on the application of Salafi doctrines in the political field. They recognize politics is important because it has high effect on social justice and the right of God to legislate. Wiktorowicz associates Salafi Siyasi with the case of Saudi Arabia and claims their rise as a generational conflict. While older Salafi Purists previously focused on the doctrine and activism of religious trivialities (purification, propagation, and education), their younger members tended to be more political. The influence of the Moslem Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*) on education reform in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s lead to the rise of a new generation of political scholars and ulama. This phenomenon was called the *Sahwa* (revival) and also referred to ulama figures such as Salman al-Awda dan Safar al-Hawali.

The third is salafi Irhabi/Jihadi. They focus on taking a militant position and claim that the recent context calls for violence and revolution are religiously justifiable. Salafi Irhabi who believe in the use of violence to establish Islamic states, had raised during the Afghanistan war against Uni Soviet, refers to ulama figures such as Osama bin Laden (2011), Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (2006), etc.

Apart from the division of Salafi into three factions, however, in practice, complicated problems are coming from the division regarding two issues, namely the ideology and application of violent jihad. They include: (1) The irony of Salafi: the most rigid of Salafi are in fact the most immune to violent jihad doctrines, meanwhile the more tolerant (those who are willing to see a little good in otherwise deviant groups), possibly the more susceptible, (2) The phenomena of passing-over and returning-back among Salafi members. In this phenomenon, Aman Abdurrahman, widely known as the pioneer of ISIS in Indonesia, is one

of many best examples of the transformation of Muslim extremist figures from Salafi Siyasi to Salafi Irhabi. In contrast, there are also examples coming from ISIS members who denounced their violent jihad ideology and activism and then joined either Salafi Siyasi or Salafi Purist and even a non-Salafi group.

**Transformation of identity in social groups and movement**

According to Yang (2000), social movements and groups allow members to change their identities, which has drawn the attention of numerous researchers in recent years. Yang mentions those studies focused on the influence of identity construction on the emergence of a social group and movement, the consequence of individual biography to the participation, and how the participation impacts identity and the following activism among the member.

From the previous literature review, several studies concluded that participation in a social group and movement could change identity linked to the nature of the group and movement such as a counter-hegemony. According to Yang (2000), the construction of identity has been the topic of studies such as by Melluci (1989) and Cerulo (1997). Studies about the influence of identity construction on the emergence of a social group and movement are such as those by Johnson *et.al* (1994) and Giroud (1995). Others focus on the consequences of individual biography participation and focus on how it impacts their identity and following activism, such as Downton & Wehr, (1997) and Robbnet (1997).

Yang (2000) explains that studies about the impacts of individual biography on participation in any social group and movement fall into two categories. The first is a study that focuses on immediate consequences such as the work of Morris (1984) and Downton & Wehr (1997). They reveal that the experience of involvement impacts their participants, such as tendencies to become more committed members. A study by Lichtermann (1996) shows that practices of several commitments among environmentalists help create a new identity for their activists. Meanwhile, a study by Morris (1984) finds that deep and

meaningful social interaction enables the transformation of members of an oppressed group who tend to be docile into protesters. The second is study about the long-term impact. They show that there is a correlation between experience in a social group and movement and commitment to sustainable political activism. Among others, according to Yang (2000) studies by Rupp & Taylor (1987) and Whittier (1995) conclude that in a hostile political atmosphere, a social group and movement including women remains to exist mainly because of the long-term commitment to their members.

It is noted that studies about the immediate and long-term impacts must underline the transformation of power in the experience of their members. In order to explain why such experiences have transformative power, most studies highlight social interaction in collective experiences. Yang (2000) emphasizes distinguishing social groups and movements from routine social and political processes. Thus, a study by Lichteman (1996) about identity in the Ridge Green Movements shows that being green does not tend to change radicalized into established traditions of a group and movement. Similarly, a study by Fantasia (1988) explains that the process of collective actions is essential to the construction of identity. The implicit explanation is that access to existing structures of group and movements break the border of similar structures and lead to a change.

According to Azca (2011), if identity plays a vital role in mobilizing and sustaining participation, it helps us to understand why and how members exit from their social groups and movements. Azca also explains that Muslim extremist has different ways during their life in prison and aftermath. They lost their basic needs, such as human freedom of physical and social mobility, under the state's exercise of power and authority. This situation enables them to have any pressure regarding their identity in which their commitment to violent jihad ideology and their attachment to extremist groups would be also under pressure. Furthermore, the pressure will reveal 3 possible impacts on any Muslim extremist

such as (a) Identity-enhancement meaning attachment to violent jihad ideology and commitment of Muslim extremists to their group's increase, (b) Identity-shift meaning to become altered; and (c) Identity-confusion meaning to become confused.

**Short profiles of former Muslim extremists**

This section will present the life stories of four former Muslim extremists: Nasir Abas, Ali Imron, Ja'far Thalib, and Mataharitimoer/MT. Although their respective violent jihad trajectories are dissimilar, they share a similar experience so, called the phase of deradicalization during their Jihad periods, that later caused them to either disengage from their groups or denounce their violent jihad ideologies.

**Nasir Abas: the former captain jihad**[2]

Abas was born in 1969 in Singapore but raised in Malaysia and studied at MIS (*Ma'had Ittiba'us Sunnah*) Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan. Between 1987 and 1993, facilitated by Abdullah Sungkar & Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, he joined Afghanistan Military Academy/AMA, completing his first 3 years as a student and 3 years became an instructor for Indonesian jihadists affiliated with JI. In mid-1998, as commander of *wakalah* (agency) in Sabah Malaysia, Abas managed the journey of JI members who would leave for military training and to join MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) in the Philippines. In 2000, Abas and Mustapha established *Uhud Project* to send fighters to communal conflict in Ambon and Poso. In April 2001, Abas was appointed Leader of Mantiqi 3 (the regional division encompassed Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia (East Kalimantan and Central Sulawesi). On April 18, 2003, Abas was arrested by the police in Bekasi during a crackdown in the wake of BB1. He was surprised by his arrest because

[2] Interview with Nasir Abas, 2010.

he had nothing to do with the BB1 except that he knew some perpetrators. In November 2004 he was freed, showing his remorse and expressing his commitment to helping the police to run the deradicalization program.

**Ali Imron: a former field operator of jihad**[3]

Imron was born in Lamongan in 1970. He is the younger brother of Ali Ghufron and Amrozi who got death sentences and were executed for their involvement in BB1. Between 1992 and 1995, facilitated by Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Baasyir, Imron joined AMA in Afghanistan. In August and September 2000, Imron was indirectly involved (helping to obtain explosive materials) in the Philippine Ambassador's Bombing & Atrium Senen Bombing. During the Ambassador bombing, together with Amrozi, Imron helped find the car. In December 2000, he was involved in 3 church bombings in Mojokerto, with Hambali (initiator), Amrozi, Mubarak, Sawad, Salman, and Muhajir. Imron was tasked with choosing and surveying the target, purchasing the material,preparing the bombs, and placing a bomb in one church. On October 12, 2002, Imron was involved in the BB1. He was tasked with surveying the target, purchasing the material, and helping Azahari and Dulmatin to prepare the bomb. He picked up the suicide bombers (Jimmy and Arnasan). On January 14, 2003, the police in Kuala Berukang, Kalimantan, captured Imron as he tried to flee the country. In February 2003 Imron publicly admitted his role in the attacks and demonstrated how they were carried out. He said he feels sorry for the victims' families but described the US and its allies as legitimate targets. In July 2003, Imron went on trial, and in September, prosecutors asked for a 20-year jail term for Imron, saying they did not want the death sentence because the defendant had expressed remorse for what he had done. Imron was convicted of planning an act of terrorism and sentenced to life in prison after the Court said it had considered

[3] Interview with Ali Imron, 2010.

his expression of regret. Imron is still serving his life imprisonment after President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono rejected his application for his detention to be limited to 20 years. Together with Abas and Mubarok, Imron has been helping the Indonesian police to run the deradicalization program.

**Ja'far Thalib: a former troop commander of the jihad**[4]

Thalib was born in Malang in 1961 to a Yemeni family and the family of an al-Irshad activist. He studied at LIPIA /Indonesian Islamic and Arabic Institute sponsored by Saudi Arabia (1986-1987) and then at Maududi Islamic Institute, Lahore Pakistan (1987-1989). During these times he joined struggling groups in Afghanistan (Hikmatyar, Sayyaf, and Rabbani) and then studied in Yemen (1991). In 1994, Thalib established Pesantren Ihyaussunnah in Yogyakarta, where he preached and spread Salafi teachings. He also established an Indonesian-Salafi network that refers to the same group in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In March 2000, LJ held military training in several cities and then national training in Bogor in April 2000. On April 16 2000 LJ held demonstrations in front of the *Istana Negara* (state palace) and demanded a dialogue with President Gus Dur. At the end of April and in mid-May 2000, LJ sent about 3000 fighters to Ambon and Poso. In March 2001 LJ executed *Rajam* (stoning to death) in Ambon. In May 2001 the police at Juanda Airport of Surabaya captured him. On May 17, Thalib was serving house arrest but requested to be freed; soon after this, the Court freed him. In August 2001, Thalib expressed his disappointment at the inauguration of Megawati as the President. In April 2002 he delivered his speech in *Tabligh Akbar* in Ambon. The police accused his speech of being provocative.

[4] See Noorhaidi Hassan, 2006, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy and the Quest for Identity in Post New-Order Indonesia,* Ithaca NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program; Saiful Umam, 2006, "Radical Muslim in Indonesia: The Case of Ja'far Umar Thalib and the Laskar Jihad, in *Exploration in Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 6 Spring No. 1, 2006, see: http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/2255/Exp6n1-1%20Umam.pdf?sequence=1

In May 2002 after returning from Ambon, Thalib has captured at the Juanda airport Surabaya and sent to prison. In July 2002, with a guarantee from his lawyers, Thalib got a new status as a housing prisoner. In August 2002, Thalib went on trial due for his speech in *Tabligh Akbar* in Ambon that was alleged to be provoking Muslims to fight against Christians. In October 2002, he suddenly declared the dissolution of LJ. He then occupied himself by running his Pesantren and a preacher who to some extent would love to cooperate with the police. In January 2003, the Court decided that Thalib was not guilty.

**Mataharitimoer: a former underground jihad activist**[5]

MT was born in Jakarta in 1971 to a low-income family. In 1990, after dropping out from senior high school he engaged in odd job. MT was first introduced to NII from a *halaqoh* underground held by a mosque in Jakarta and then joined the movement. While serving as a head of *Remaja Masjid* (Youth of the Mosque), he was tasked to spread NII ideology and recruit new members. He extended the recruitment to schools in Jakarta. MT attended a discussion at *al-A'raf* mosque in Kwitang to enhance his religious knowledge. In 1991 due to the capture of several NII leaders by the police, MT lost contact with NII leaders but continued to recruit new members. In 1992, after separating from NII for a year, several leaders came to MT asking his network in Jakarta to be linked with theirs. MT moved from one place to another to avoid the police. He finally entered the elite group of NII and served as a secretary of internal affairs who was responsible for the recruitment and training of NII members in several cities. MT then found many deviant behaviors in the group. He initially questioned the vision and mission of NII. All new NII members must undergo "sin-cleansing" rituals and pledge to help establish an Islamic state by paying monthly contributions to the group's leader. MT realized that the group used him and other members as likely

[5] Interview with Mataharitimoer, 2010.

cash-cow to enrich the leaders and their luxurious lifestyles. His conflict with several leaders strengthened his desire to leave. Since 1997 MT has gradually left NII. In 2007 MT reemerged to the public with his autobiography which recollected his experience and explained why he finally left. Besides recently being a social-media activist, MT has been involved in running a pesantren-based NGO named ICDW/Indonesian Center for Deradicalization and Wisdom that primary objective is to assist existing NII members who want to leave the group.

**Ideological transformation: from salafi jihadi/irhabi to salafi purist**

After describing the violent jihad trajectories of Abas, Imron, Thalib, and MT, it is important to look at how their new interpretation of jihad ideology has shifted from Salafi-Irhabi to Salafi-Purist. MT was an exception since he has shifted into a new understanding of jihad ideology similar to the majority of moderate Muslims in Indonesia.

Salafis-Purist and Salafi-Irhabi share a similar determination to restore the purity of the faith. They regard themselves as guardians of that purity and as the one group of Muslims who will gain access to heaven after the Prophet's warning.[6] However, they differ on four key issues. (1) First is whether it is permissible to rebel against Muslim governments, as Salafi-Purist says no while Salafi-Irhabi say yes; (2) Second is that in terms of organization whereby Salafi-Irhabi claim that in order to achieve their political goals they require a level of organization that to Salafi-Purist, smacks of partyism; (3) Third is that Salafi Purist tends to define the concept of jihad in broad terms along the lines of taking whatever actions are necessary to improve one's own faith while Salafi-jihadists defines it as a battle; (4) Fourth is that both groups prefer different tactics and acceptable methodologies for achieving their aims, particularly concerning Jihad

[6] The prophet Hadith says "My (the Prophet) Ummah will get divided into 73 factions and each one will go to hell but saved one and that one is the real follower of the Prophet"

(ICG, 2004). After deradicalization, Abas, Imron, and Thalib clearly share new interpretations of jihad ideology that are in line with Salafi-Purist.

In the case of Abas and Imron, unlike their former groups, JI holds a Salafi-Irhabi interpretation of violent jihad ideology, Abas and Imron have clearly shifted their interpretation. When criticizing BB1, they agree that in the absence of a true commander of the faithful worldwide, any jihad can only be defensive (*dafai'i*), but they have radically different notions of what constitutes defensive. For Salafi Purists, a defensive jihad is permissible when Muslims are under attack and the faithful have the capacity to fend off attackers.

However, Ali Ghufron, a senior JI member, has a different opinion. He writes in prison "*The Bali Bomb Jihad: A Defence*"[7] in which his jihad opinion is clearly in line with the ideology of Salafi-Irhabi. According to Ghufron, the best form of defense is attack. The aim of jihad is not simply to protect other Muslims, but also to destroy any obstacle in the way of upholding Islam and to strike fear into the hearts of all enemies of Allah, among whom should be included all hypocrites, idolaters, and *kafirs*. He terms those who have the power to create fear, *irhabiyyun,* and notes that the best English translation of this is terrorists.

Ghufron also writes that there are many reasons some Salafi Purist explain their reluctance to go to war, including that the blood of many Muslims could be shed without achieving any clear objective. For him, all these reasons amount to prioritizing personal opinion more than the hadith, which mandates jihad. However, even if almost everyone on earth refuses to wage war, there will always be a vanguard (*thoifah mansuroh*) who will go to war and who are the closest of all the ummat to the Prophet himself. The Salafi Irhabi,-and by implication BB1-are part of that vanguard. Ghufron defines Salafi Purist as the group that bases its understanding of Islam, especially the issue of *aqidah* and within that, *tauhid,* on

[7] Ali Gufron, April 2003, *Jihad Bom Bali: Sebuah Pembelaan,* the handwritten manuscript dated April 2003 appears to have been written as a defense plea but it was never actually used in court. ICG had a copy.

the Qur'an and hadith according to the understanding of the Salafi ulama. However, he dismisses such people as Salafi Sufi. If the prophet had waited until all his followers were steeped in knowledge, he says, they never would have defeated the kafirs in Medina. To treat jihad as something only the educated can attempt is therefore an innovation (*bid'ah*). Jihad should be seen as much an obligation for Muslims as prayers, alms, fasting, and the pilgrimage; it is a means to acquire religious knowledge, not contingent on it.

Abas and Imron share that in the situation of defensive jihad, what should be of concern is that the immediate goal is not violent jihad but only preparation *(I*'dadiyah), or even education (*tarbiyah*) and purification (*tashfiyah*) and that only Muslims with the requisite level of understanding should embark on jihad. Abas claims that the early JI period (1993-1999) under the leadership of Abdullah Sungkar shifted focus from the (Islamic) state to society. The focus was attention to education and propagation. The JI postponed addressing other agenda items to see how society responded to the propagation; however, this was the era before the JI engaged in terrorist attacks under the leadership of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir.

Abas and Imron's new interpretation of Jihad ideology are to some extent in the mold of non-violent JI factions. It is not that armed jihad in specific circumstances, but that it is allowed under certain strict conditions, such as on the battlefield in defense of Islam, and civilians should not be targeted. When Abas was asked if the al-Qaeda fatwa had not emerged, would he still have been part of the JI network, training soldiers to go to kill the infidels somewhere in the world, Abas admitted, "*I think so, yeah*".

In Ja'far Thalib's case, the Ambon conflict brought the Salafi Purist and Salafi Irhabi into direct confrontation. Thalib secured approval from some Salafi scholars in the Middle East to send fighters to wage jihad in defense of the Moluccas. By 2000, fighters backed by senior JI members and representing a Salafi-Irhabi were also on the ground, and it was not long before the 2 groups clashed verbally and physically. The Salafi Purist saw the struggle as a defensive

jihad and a way to protect the state from Christian separatists. Meanwhile, the Salafi-Irhabi saw Ambon as a part of a broader jihad against Christian/Western interests. In May 2000, JI began a chain of bombings that eventually led to Bali in October 2002 and the Marriot Hotel in August 2003.

During the eruption of violence in Poso, sympathy for the Salafi-Irhabi approach seemed more apparent. However, it is interesting to note how resistant by and large, the Salafi network was to approaches by jihadist groups. The period of the most intensive JI recruitment in Indonesia, 2000-2002, coincided with the period of greatest solidarity within the FKAWJ. Therefore, while JI leaders put a high premium on the indoctrination of new recruits into the Salafi Purist manhaj, those recruits were more likely to be either young men from families affected by the violence, those associated with DI, organizations that had provided some kind of community; youth mosques, Jamaah Tabligh, student organizations, but rarely Salafi-Purist Pesantren. A former JI member confirmed to ICG that Salafi-Irhabi schools were poor sources for recruits, but there is interesting documentary evidence as well. In 1999, the JI's central java wakalah (administrative division) produced a detailed list of 368 religious leaders in the province whom they had approached to see if they had any inclination to support JI activities. Only 8 on the list were strict Salafi-Irhabi, and only one was interested (ICG, 2004).

In the case of Mataharitimoer/MT, he became more moderate compared to Abas, Imron, and Thalib. He shares that he no longer aspires for the Islamic state as he previously had. He totally rejects the use of violence in jihad by referring to his opinion that Islam is a religion that is open to innovation and that jihad has many interpretations. He thinks that in a peaceful state like Indonesia, we should try to cooperate and walk hand in hand. MT also refers to al-Qur'an surah al-Hujurah saying that God has created different genders, ethnicity, races, and nations so that human beings would acknowledge and respect each other, not divide and fight one another.

MT accepts Indonesia although it is Pancasila rather than an Islamic-based state. He argues that the state already follows Islamic principles and allows Muslims to express their religious views. MT explains that Islam cannot be compared to Pancasila since the latter is only a tiny part of the people-government interaction. Pancasila is "Islamic "since it appreciates and guarantees people's plurality and needs, such as equality, justice, brotherhood, and welfare. However, MT recognizes that a state, whether a Pancasila or Islamic state, success depends on the honesty and kind-heartedness of human beings.

Based on the above explanations, it is clear that the potency of violent jihad from former Muslim extremists continues to exist. They just shifted their jihad ideology from Salafi-Irhabi to Salafi-Purist because of the situation and conditions that forced them to recognize that it is unjustifiable to conduct violent jihad. However, as the ideology, they still keep violent jihad in their mind.

Abas's comments that if there was no 1998 he possibly would still be part of the NI network is pungent and reflects the significant limitations of co-opting the good extremist approach. Abas and Imron have not eschewed armed Jihad but merely recognized restraints on its implementation. The right to employ armed violence in pursuit of the Islamic state in Indonesia remains a potential instrument to be used at the right time, the proper time, against America or the Indonesian government. It is thus very important to recognize that the deradicalization program run by the police where the good extremists engage bad extremists in debate, even if they are successful in compelling JI extremists to rethink their position on Jihad, seems to be purely mitigatory in nature.

Although Abas and Imron may be sincere in their mission, there are limits to how far the mental opening can go. There is a possibility that given some future concatenation of events and circumstances, JI extremists would simply resume their violent ways and perhaps even be joined by their DI cousins, should their leaders declare hostilities. The real problem of JI is that they remain radical in their heads, which is to varying degrees, they think, feel and act following the

stock us-versus-them, good-versus-evil, the JI worldview that makes them all, to differing extents, to be walking time bombs. This begs the question of whether non-violent approaches to an Islamic state can be seen as an optimal position from the binary worldview perspective. The answer is no; the deeply-rooted xenophobic us-versus-them dynamic would almost certainly animate an Islamic regime based on the JI principles. This should not be surprising, given the solid uncertainty-avoidance cultural outlook that Arabized modernism has bequeathed to the JI itself. It requires complementary, longer-range, secondary cognitive immunization measures directed at JI and wider extremist groups in Indonesia. The aim must be to reduce the longer cognitive vulnerability of young Muslims to the virulent JI views of the world. The stock solution is to encourage critical thought aimed at opening up their worldviews through various modalities.

**Identity transformation: from jihadist to pacifist**

According to Najib Azca (2011), if identity plays a critical role in mobilizing and sustaining participation, they also help explain people's exodus from such groups. Azca explains that Jihadists take different paths during their imprisonment or its aftermath. Each of them lost their basic human freedom of physical mobility under the state's exercise of power and authority, and this led to pressure on their identity, which had previously been defined based on their attachment and commitment to violent jihadism and loyalty to their groups. Azca explains that such pressure brings about 3 possible effects for violent Jihadists. Those include identity enhancement, meaning the attachment and commitment of jihadists to violent jihadism and their group increases identity shift, meaning that this attachment is altered; and identity confusion, meaning that the individual becomes confused.

Imron, Abas, Thalib, and MT changed their ideologies by publicly confessing, correcting their previous violent jihad. In the case of Imron and Abas assisting the police in running the deradicalization program, Thalib not only going

back to focus on his Salafi Pesantren but also cooperating with police through seminar and discussion forums, and MT establishing an NGO named ICDW in which he created programs to help existing NII members to leave. This represents some sort of an identity shift.

According to Azca (2011) in the categorization of active defection, it can be seen that one is resigning one's union membership instead of resigning as a union activist. For Abas and Imron, although they left their status as JI members behind and criticized JI's ideology and strategy on violent Jihad, they continue to claim to be jihadists. Thalib recognized the dissolution of the LJ and argued that the group was not needed based on the edict (*fatwa*) from his Salafi mentor, but that LJ's umbrella FKAWJ, in which Thalib is also a leader, continues to exist and has even become a bigger group. With this position, Thalib quickly claims himself to be a jihadist. For MT, he left his status as a member of NII and even criticized NII's ideology and strategy vis-à-vis Jihad, but he did not continue to claim he is a jihadist.

Therefore, Abas and Imron have shifted their identities away from group identity as JI activists to individual identity as jihadists. For Thalib, he has shifted his identity; from the LJ activist to another organizational activist (the FKWAJ activist). Both are jihadist groups with the same ideology but different strategies. Meanwhile, MT transforms differently with Abas, Imron, and Thalib. MT has shifted his identity from organizational identity as an NII activist to a non-jihadist activist.

The above explanations confirm Yang (2000) observation saying that the degree of personal-identity change may vary with the depth of deradicalization experience. The relative deradicalization of Muslim extremists implies that they do not transform identities equally. I assume that the degree of personal transformation depends on the extent to which extremists are freed from previous structural conditions and on the depth and intensity of the new experiences of jihadists. The stronger the contrast between pre-participation

structural embeddings and the leveling effects unleashed by the group, the greater effect and the more profound the transformative power of extremists. Yang (2000) also explains that most biographical studies on the impacts of deradicalization fall into two categories; immediate and long-term impacts. Studies about immediate impacts show that the experience of being involved in violent jihad means that they still tend to become more committed jihad activists. They steadfastly hold on to their jihadism but use different activities to express their commitment than what they would have if they had stayed with the extremist group. However, studies about long-term impact show that violent jihad ideology becomes weaker and former Muslim extremists tend to incorporate it into normal life.

Abas, was previously the leader and trainer of the JI but different from the group, he held opinions about the interpretation of defensive and offensive Jihad. After deradicalization, he served a temporary jail sentence but has since returned back to society and is involved in helping the police. As long as he cooperates with the police, it seems that he will maintain his disengagement from JI. In the immediate impact, what makes him different is the shift from violent jihad/ the Salafi-Irhabi to the less-violent jihad/ Salafi Purist. Furthermore, 11 years after the police captured him in 2003, he still claims himself a jihadist; thus, for Abas, deradicalization will have a long-term impact.

Imron was previously an operator of JI but he sometimes doubted JI activities. He had conducted violent jihad only in the name of group solidarity and respect for his brother, a senior JI member, Ali Ghufron. Since Imron is now serving a life sentence in jail, he will easily maintain his disengagement from JI. Like Abas, what makes Imron different in immediate impact is his ideological transformation from violent to less-violent jihad. 10 years after the police captured him in 2004, he still claims himself a jihadist; thus, for Imron, deradicalization will also be an along-term impact.

Thalib was previously the leader and commander of LJ. Both the establishment and dissolution of LJ were based partly on the edict (*fatwa*) from his Salafi mentor in the Middle East. The dissolution of LJ was also allegedly the result of pragmatic motives, between fatwa and political-economic privilege. After deradicalization, Thalib was temporarily in jail but recently released back to society. He sometimes cooperates with the police. As long as he does not receive any further fatwa to conduct violent jihad and his cooperation with the police is sustainable, Thalib's disengagement from the violent-jihad-group can be ensured. In the immediate impact, what makes him different was the shift from Salafi-Irhabi to Salafi-Purist. Since FKAWJ, the LJ continues to exist and 12 years after LJ was disbanded in 2002 Thalib still claims himself a jihadist, thus his deradicalization will be the long-term impact.

MT was previously NII's sub-leader and left it after becoming disappointed with the group and seeing that the Indonesian state had previously intended to work with NII. He has returned to society and no longer makes claims as a jihadist. As such, he has shifted his ideology from violent to moderate jihad; thus, his deradicalization is the immediate impact.

Sarlito Wirawan Sartono, a psychologist, working in the deradicalization program run by Indonesian police says it can take up to 3 years to convince someone not to act on their violent jihad. At this rate, it would take decades to even talk to 1 year's supply of recruits from the extremist Pesantren/Madrasah and the prisons. Sartono claims that the program also has an 80 percent success rate. He says attacking the violent-jihad ideology head-on simply did not work because the extremist imams still hold such sway (Bachelard, 2012). He says:

> *I am not replacing anything. I leave their beliefs but I say do not do this and this […] do not start hurting people […]. Then we bring in the wives, and family and say "How about helping each other? [...]. It is a step-by-step process and it takes at least 3 years. It is not an easy job.*

Sartono explains that deradicalization must be based on the premise that extremists were not mentally ill, but rather rational actors motivated by a genuine

desire to change society. Consequently, the key to reforming them was not ultimately through punishment but through moral suasion. He also concludes that discussion will not be effective at the ideological level but at the applicative-operational level. For example, the discussion about killing innocent people who do not attack Islam, killing women and children, whether Java and Bali can be considered a jihad zone of war, etc. Sartono recognizes that although low-level extremists show signs of interest in new ideas, once they returned to their group their belief in violent jihad was usually reaffirmed. He suggests that bringing extremists to see the impact of their violent attacks, including how devastated the families of Muslim victims were, seems to be effective in changing their mindset of violent jihad.[8]

The adaptation of the extremist Muslim network's sub-culture is also crucial. Sartono, quoting Ramakhrisna, mentions five core elements of sub-culture. The first is an intense sense of existential identity anxiety. Members of extremist Muslim groups tend to be gripped by the fear of extinction as a religious group identity in the face of westernization, secularization, nationalism, and other generalized cultural threats. The second is a pathological propensity for black-and-white categorical thinking. The third is a strong sense of moral entitlement derived in part from their self-image of utopia as a pious community divinely elected to further social justice in the land. The fourth is respect for seniors since extremist Muslim groups reflect the large power orientations. The fifth is the mimetic impulse to wrest away the power, status, and prestige that the infidels (*kafir*) are perceived to possess and claim these attributes for Muslims. Sartono urges that the appropriate strategy and method for the implementation of deradicalization must be mainly based on those sub-cultures so that the initial process of deradicalization, namely having trust and good relations with Muslim extremists could be strongly built.[9]

[8] Sarlito Wirawan Sartono, 2010, Interview, Jakarta
[9] Sarlito Wirawan Sartono, 2010, *Interview,* Jakarta.

## Conclusion

Deradicalization may be generally understood as a process leading toward the decreased use of religious and political violence**.** In the Indonesian context, most cases of deradicalization of Muslim extremists bring about new interpretations of jihad ideology and a new identity for the jihadist.

Concerning the transition into a new interpretation of jihad ideology, Indonesian Muslim extremists typically switch from the Salafi Irhabi/jihadi and Salafi Siyasi/politico jihad ideologies to the Salafi Purist ideology when they achieve deradicalization. It means that to some extent after deradicalization, Indonesian Muslim extremists would shift from violent to less-violent jihad ideology. They still hold and believe in violent ideology but have strict rules for its application and implementation. Only a few Muslim extremists shift from violent jihad to moderate and non-violent jihad ideology. If it happens, it is usually the result of a personal reflection and not because there is external persuasion, as the case of Mataharitimoer, a former extremist of NII shows. Based on these findings, I conclude that the transformation of jihad does not guarantee that the potency of religious extremism will no longer exist. I realize that it will continue to exist since most Indonesian Muslim extremists only shift their jihad ideologies because of the situation and conditions they found themselves in, which subsequently forced them to recognize it is unjustifiable to conduct violent jihad activism.

Furthermore, regarding the transformation into a new identity of jihadists after the deradicalization, I found two impacts namely immediate and long-term impacts. I argue that the immediate impact after the deradicalization of Indonesian Muslim extremists shows that the experience of involvement in violent-jihad activism means that they still tend to become more committed as jihad activists. They claim themselves as jihadists and continue to believe strongly in less-violent jihad activism. However, they have taken their jihad activism a new form and meaning. In this situation, it is harder for former Muslim extremists to

become ideologically deradicalized the more knowledge and experience violent jihad extremists have. However, research on the long-term impact shows that their violent jihad ideology declined, and there is a greater tendency for them to reintegrate into society, no longer as a jihadist but as social-media activists, such as in the case of Mataharitimoer.

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