

Security Issues in Southeast Asia: Understanding Indonesian Terrorism through the Life Story of Ali Imron

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Terrorism has attracted the attention of not only many researchers, but also governments around the world. Terrorism in Indonesia, in particular created shockwaves in Australia as it directly affected many Australians. Important questions that have rarely been asked are how people become engaged in terrorist groups, progress in them, and commit terror attacks. Why, too, do some of these people eventually disengage from their former commitment? All these questions are important in that the answers can provide useful information for policy makers seeking to discourage people from joining terrorist groups as well as encouraging them to disengage from terrorist activities. This paper seeks some answers in the life story of Ali Imron, an Indonesian bomber who has renounced terrorism, using the 'Process Model' proposed by Horgan (2005). This paper will also assess the applicability of the process model concept.

Introduction

Terrorism in Indonesia has gained the attention of many researchers and governments around the world. A series of terrorist attacks in Indonesia including the first Bali Bombing (12 October 2002, hereafter BB1), the Marriott Hotel Bombing in Jakarta (5 August 2003), the Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta (9 September 2004, hereafter AEB), and the second Bali bombing (1 October 2005; hereafter BB2); all of these attacks were masterminded by a group of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) activists including Ali Imron, Amrozi, Imam Samudra, Mukhlas, Dr. Azahari and Noordin Mohammad Top. The attacks shocked many in Australia, a nation unused to dealing with terrorist violence and casualties. Many reports, articles and books have been published on the incidents. These have offered different explanations for the attacks and various suggestions for assuaging terrorist activities. However, our understanding of Indonesian terrorism is still not satisfactory. We still know little about terrorist recruitment, or the reasons why former terrorists came to disengage from their erstwhile militancy. These questions are germane to the minimisation and potential eradication of terrorist activity in Indonesia. This article attempts to address these questions with the benefit of insights obtained from consideration of the life story of one of the JI terrorists, Ali Imron (hereafter Imron), one of the main perpetrators of the BB1 incident, using what we might call the 'Process Model' proposed by Horgan (2005). At the same time this article will assess the applicability of the Horgan model to the Indonesian context, which obviously differs to Europe and the Middle East.

Literature Review

Two major shortcomings exist in current studies of terrorism, namely 1) an imbalance in focus, and 2), approaches which betray mono-causal explanations.

Imbalance in focus

Studies by the International Crisis Group (ICG) have produced a great deal of valuable information on the organisation and activities of terrorist groups, especially JI. ICG has examined JI's cell-based structure in organising the 2000 Christmas Eve bombings in Indonesia and JI's links with

radical groups in the Malukus and Poso (ICG 2002). The ICG also assessed the strength of JI, although later events showed that it probably underestimated its capacity to wage attacks (ICG 2003). A later study reveals disagreements within the Indonesian Salafi community regarding violent radical Islamic activities, pointing out that most radical Salafists are religious rather than political activists, and are not in favour of terrorism (ICG 2004). Subsequent studies have examined the structural complexity of radical Islamic organisations within Indonesia in relation to the Australian Embassy bombing (ICG 2005), and the evolution of radical Islamic networks under the supervision of Noordin Mohammed Top. However, none of these studies examines the individual experiences of Indonesian terrorists, a problem recognised by the ICG:

The troubling thing is that there seems to be no shortage of new recruits, and recruiters like Subur Sugiarto or Jabir appear to have had little difficulty tapping into their personal networks to find new people as needed. *We do not yet have a clear idea of the recruitment arguments*, except that Abdul Aziz... said he joined not because he approved of bombing but because he shared Noordin's hatred of the U.S. and its allies (ICG 2006, 19, emphasis added).

Studies by academics also display a similar lack of interest in the motivations of individual recruits. Asfar *et al.* (2003), for example, studied the effects of Bali Bombing I on *pesantrens* (Islamic rural boarding schools) in East Java, specifically "Al Islam" in Tenggulun, where three of the organisers had previously taught (Ali Ghufron alias Mukhlas, Ali Imran, and Amrozi); this study mainly provides information on how the bombing affected nearby *pesantrens*. Jamhari and Jahroni (2004) examine radical salafi movements, including their structures, ideologies, activities, and their prospects in Indonesia. Turmudi and Sihbudi (2004) specifically investigate the radicalism of *Salafi* groups in *pesantrens*. Barton (2005) examines the religious, cultural and political development of JI, and points out that it is similar to radical organisations linked to al-Qaeda. This study is complemented by a book by Fealy and Borgu (2005), who follow the development of radical Islam in Indonesia from its roots in Daarul Islam to the present. Abuza (2007) builds on these studies to explore the strategies adopted by JI to survive Indonesian government crackdowns following the suicide bombings. In sum, however, these studies give little attention to the life stories of the terrorists.

In addition to these Indonesia-specific studies, there are numerous studies of the Southeast Asian region more generally. But once again these tend to concentrate on organisations rather than actors. For example, Conboy (2006) traces the origins and evolution of radical Islam in Southeast Asia; Neighbour (2005) describes in detail radical Islamic organisations; Abuza (2003) investigates how al-Qaeda made inroads into Southeast Asia and developed links with previously unaffiliated localised radical groups; Kumar and Tan (2003) examine the operations of radical Islamic organisations in the region, as well as their ideological and political motivations, their regional linkages, and the locations and operations of radical Islamic organisations in the region. The current literature on regional terrorism thus has limitations in the understanding of the life stories of the suicide bombers and other lower rank members. Consequently, we know little about the factors that might have led them to join terrorist groups and engage in terrorist acts – or what factors led some of these terrorists to disengage from such activity.

The search for mono-causal explanations

Many studies use an approach that seeks to reduce the causes of terrorism to a few overriding factors. Thus some academics claim that terrorist activities are encouraged chiefly by either religious or ideological zealotry. Hassan (2007) and Ramakrishna (2007), for example, emphasise the role of Islamism in motivating suicide bombers. This argument has been rejected by Pape (2005), who uses demographic data on a great number of suicide terrorists from around the world to argue that religion or ideology has little to do with terrorist attacks. Instead, he argues that the underlying motivation for suicide attacks is to attempt to remove foreign troops from the homeland, or to overthrow governments installed by a foreign power. Pape has in turn been criticised by Moghadam (2006), who finds that it is not the US occupation but the *jihadist* ideology of al-Qaeda that causes ongoing terror attacks in Iraq.

Finally, Barton (2005) and Sageman (2004) conclude that networks of family and friends are the most important factors promoting terrorist activities.

Some authors have resorted to psychological explanations, but these often seek to account for terrorism in terms of an individual mental imbalance or abnormality (see, for example, Post 1990), and are also inadequate. As Horgan points out, current theories that adopt psychological modes of explanation suffer from “so many conceptual, theoretical and methodological” weaknesses that they are “not only weakened as asserted (and testable) hypotheses but are flawed internally, inconsistent and demonstrate a lack of understanding of basic psychological concepts” (2005, 76). Some theorists have adopted a weaker version of this psychological approach, noting that terrorists are not necessarily imbalanced, but “different” in some way. It is not clear, however, what these differences may be (Pape 2005). The common shortcoming of these studies is that they are unable to fully account for the variety of factors that lead individuals to take up terrorism. Few human activities can be explained in simple terms, and most have a wide range of causal factors.

Addressing the Problems of Interpretation

This paper will address each of the problems of interpretation outlined above. The first will be addressed by analysing the life story of Ali Imron (alias Ale) which has been published recently as *Pengakuan Ali Imron, sang Pengebom (The Admission of Ali Imron, the Bomber [Imron 2007])*, but is not available in English. Ali Imron was arrested in a small hut at Kuala Bengkuang on the mouth of the Mahakam River, East Kalimantan Province. He admitted guilt to authorities and has been sentenced to life imprisonment (although a clemency appeal is pending). This book is important to Western audiences as much of the information presented in it reveals a great deal about the dynamics of the (previously) secret process of how Ali Imron became involved in JI, and how he helped carry out terror attacks (especially the BB1, where two hundred Westerners including eighty eight Australians were killed and many others were injured). This account also reveals what made Ali Imron disengage with, and ultimately renounce terrorism.

The second problem will be addressed by employing what I call the “Process Model” of analysis proposed by Horgan (2005). This emphasised the life stories of those involved in terrorist organisations in Europe such as the IRA, the PIRA (Provisional IRA), the Italian Red Brigade and Middle Eastern organisations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but Horgan’s kind of analysis has never been applied to Indonesia, which is culturally and politically different. For example, Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world but Indonesian Muslims is typically moderate; nor is Indonesia under foreign occupation. The application of Horgan’s model helps understand the process by which a person becomes a member of a terror group, how their membership is sustained, how they come to commit terrorist acts and, eventually, how some of them exit the group or cease their terror activities. I will now summarise the model and then briefly introduce Imron before analysing his life stories, in doing so showing how this approach sheds more light on the complex phenomenon of terrorism in Indonesia.

The ‘Process Model’

This model assumes that terrorism is a complex phenomenon, that it is better understood as a process, and that the process is systematic, or carried out by individuals in a group acting according to rational choices. As such, the reasons for joining a terrorist organisation may be different from the factors that influence continuing involvement in the group, and these factors may be different from those that influence engagement in terrorist acts, or influence the abandonment of terrorism. This model involves a detailed look at the process of becoming a member of an organisation, progressing towards and becoming engaged in terror acts, and finally the process of disengagement. The model as defined by Horgan (2005) consists of three phases.

Phase 1: The process of becoming (a member of a terrorist group or organisation)

During this phase a person decides to join a terrorist organisation, often in the context of the following stages:

1. The presence of suitable ‘preconditions’

Preconditions are those situations that may encourage an outbreak of terrorism if left unresolved (eg a lack of democracy, emergence of extreme ideologies, great economic inequalities, or occupation by foreign forces);

2. Occurrence of a catalyst:

A catalyst is an event that ‘pushes’ individuals to get involved in a terrorist organisation. The event must be considered significant by the individual, including incidents such as the mass killing of innocent brethren, or massacres by an occupying force;

3. Identification in addition to other positive features of involvement:

The individual has a deep identification with the victims of the catalyst event. Deep feeling or sorrow encourages the individual to join a group that fights for a common cause. This feeling may be strengthened by other positive factors including a degree of respect from the community, gradual progression toward increased involvement in terrorist activities, and various forms of engagement within the group.

4. Increased involvement subject to timing, opportunity, pacing and progression

Not all new members would be given the same opportunities to progress to more senior positions or to more sophisticated tasks such as carrying out a suicide bombing. These opportunities may be subject to timing, opportunity, pacing, and progression requirements that have been structured by the organisation. The organisation normally assesses the capacity, commitment and skills of individuals to determine their progression. Among the most committed and capable members, there are also different levels of “currency” to their progression. This is due to diversification of roles and functions within the organisation. Each function or role may require specific psychological qualities. Hence, some individuals may have to be patient before being assigned a specific function or role. To progress to this level of involvement, a person needs to possess certain qualities such as:

- The individual’s experience of, and the degree and nature of previous violence engagement such as stone throwing at the enemy (in the case of the Palestinian *intifada* participants throw stones at Israeli military forces); attendance at protest rallies and emotionally experiencing the consequences; the amount of prior knowledge and understanding of the group activities or the conflict it is involved in.
- Having specific experiences of relevance: for example, being victimised by the enemy force.
- Society’s attitude to the individual’s involvement: for example, whether they highly value the involvement of the individual.
- “The nature and extent of adult socialisation”. Some organisations like *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad* give priority to unmarried men because they want to minimise the emotional effect on their loved ones, but such priority is not applicable to the PIRA in Northern Ireland.
- “The nature of competing alternatives and opportunities”. The leadership of a terrorist organisation may envisage the individual for an alternative role: for example, as a financial backer or mentor (Horgan 2005, 101-3).

Phase 2: Being a Terrorist

The Process Model simply defines a terrorist as of the perpetrator of a terrorist act. Actors do not normally operate alone, but in a group, so it is a “group process” (Horgan 2005, 108). The group plays a significant role not only in forming the behavioural process, but more importantly, in maintaining involvement and encouraging engagement in terrorist acts such as bombing and armed robbery. This process is defined as sustained, increased, and focused involvement. Involvement in terrorist activities mainly includes the following stages: decision and search activity (targeting and “pre-terrorism”), preparation or “pre-terrorist activity”, event execution, post-event activity and strategic analysis.

Stage 1: Decision and search activity – targeting and “pre-terrorism”

This stage has the following key features:

1. A terrorist (violent) act is well planned and calculated, except in very small organisations.
2. The act involves a leadership function that makes decisions and affects the direction of the activity.
3. A target is selected, and to understand the target we need to consider three aspects: the needs and objectives of the organisation; political and social critique of the organisation; and operating constraints set by security forces.
4. The act may be criminal or political. The target may be individuals or property that has a political or symbolic role, but the terrorist act may cause indiscriminate effects.

Stage 2: Preparation or “pre-terrorist activity”

The second stage involves the preparation for a terrorist act. This may include identification and surveillance of target, including an assessment of risk; identification and choosing of personnel; training requirements, including general preparation and specific target requirements; designing, constructing and manufacturing the required equipment such as a bomb; testing of equipment and related preparation (Horgan 2005, 117).

Stage 3: Event execution

This is the peak of the terrorist act process. At this stage the terrorists have to deal with a number of issues: readying the logistics and the personnel for the act; maintaining surveillance and related security inspection tasks; managing the dynamic of the actual event, including the on the spot situation; finding escape routes (where appropriate); securing the weapon after the attack (if possible).

Stage 4: Post event activity and strategic analysis

This stage may include the following steps:

1. Escape. An obvious step after an attack is escape (except for a suicide bomber), so the availability of an escape route is a determining factor. If an escape route is unavailable, the attack could be aborted.
2. Elimination of evidence. This may include burning or abandoning of vehicle(s) used in the attack, hiding or destruction of weapons.
3. Post event evaluation feeding into the post event stage.

Defection of a core member is clearly not wanted by the leadership of a terrorist organisation as this may be dangerous for the security and even the survival of the group, so psychological shaping (indoctrination) of the members is paramount to ensure conformity, solidarity and unquestioned commitment to the ideals of the organisation. This includes obedience to authority, dehumanisation and justification, routinisation and deindividuation.

Obedience to authority

Members must totally adhere to the rules of the organization and those appointed as leaders. This factor is crucial to the execution of an order.

Dehumanisation and justification

This refers to dehumanisation of the enemy so that the terrorist action is not seen as killing another human being, but responding to military force using military means. The act is not viewed as a form of personal revenge either. The members of the organisation should be able to justify their action.

Routinisation and deindividuation

When the members are in reduced individuality, they are less sensitive to their social values, which in turn makes it easier for them to behave aggressively.

Following codes for social activity

Members must maintain secrecy in relation to their involvement in a terrorist group. They are not allowed to reveal their activities to any non-members including their family.

Phase 3: Disengaging from Terrorism

This is the least researched phase of terrorist activity, so the factors discussed below are still hypothetical. These factors are: emergence of the seeds of psychological disengagement; the presence of additional psychological influences, physical disengagement; the presence of organisational issues; and implications of leaving.

Emergence of seeds of psychological disengagement

The seeds could come from several factors. Firstly, intense pressures from outside the group which, in turn, create an untenable situation within the group, and may lead to internal disputes. Secondly, a sense of changing priorities may arise, and the individual may long for the life he/she had prior to involvement in the organisation. Thirdly, the individual may start feeling a sense of disillusionment with the activities and direction of the organisation.

Physical disengagement

This is different from psychological disengagement because the individual is removed from his/her preferred position. Physical disengagement can take several forms including apprehension by the security forces, with the prospect of being jailed; being moved to a position where the risk of being arrested is greater; forced movement to another role as a punishment for disobedience; an increase in other roles where the original role is no longer played; being dismissed from the organization; or, changes in priority.

Occurrence of organisational issues

Organisational issues might take several forms such as operational or financial problems; alternatively, the organisation might lose its relevance due to political changes.

Implications of leaving

Implications of leaving relates to the potential existence of more favourable prospects outside the organisation (a promise of a good job, better life, etc).

The Life Story of Ali Imron

Ali Imron was born in Tenggulun, East Java, in 1970. He was the youngest of seven children. Among his brothers are Ali Ghufron alias Mukhlas, Amrozi, and Amin Jabir. He attended *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (Islamic Primary School) in his hometown. His junior high school years were spent in several schools, but it is clear that his preference was an Islamic school. He spent only five months in SMP Muhammadiyah (general junior high school of the major modern Islamic organization in Indonesia) before moving to another *madrasah* i.e. *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (modern Islamic primary school), Muhammadiyah, which he completed in 1988. During his time at this school he wished to attend the *Al Islam Pesantren* at Ngruki, Solo, Central Java, where his brothers Ali Ghufron and Main Jabir had been schooled. He got his wish in 1987, but he was not happy and only stayed for one month, before moving back home to Tenggulun and completing senior high school at *Madrasah Aliyah Muhammadiyah Pondok Pesantren* (A combination of modern and classical boarding school), Karang Asem, East Java. However, Ali Imron claimed that he his studies suffered from having to walk three kilometres to school everyday.

Phase 1: Becoming a Terrorist

It is not clear if Ali Imron was aware of the roots of terrorism before he experienced the catalyst of his involvement in it, but as a student at a modern-orientated Muhammadiyah school, he should have heard news about the foreign occupation of Muslim countries such as Palestine and Afghanistan, and the subsequent oppression of Muslims by the occupying force, but he appeared not to take these issues seriously at that stage. However, upon attending a religious gathering where videos showing the oppression of Muslims in some parts of the world and several speeches were presented, he became aware of these situations, and decided to take action:

This session triggered my mind to change my bad habits... It also encouraged me to participate in the fight to defend Islam and Muslims against their enemies such as in Palestine and Afghanistan (Imron 2005, 4).

It appears that the speakers must have introduced the concept of jihad and emphasised the need to do jihad (fight in the name of God) to stop the occupation and the sufferings of fellow Muslims. Imron seems to have identified with the plight of the Muslims and the experience produced profound effects on his behaviour: for example, he studied harder and conducted other daily activities more seriously; he also intended to travel as a *muhajir* (immigrant), in order to find a place to fight the enemy of the Muslims:

From that moment I began to do things better than previously. I studied harder, changed my patterns of thinking, improved my daily activities and even began to consider travelling to find a place to fight (do *jihad*).

After he completed senior high school in 1991, Imron wrote to his older brother Ali Ghufron, who had already attended a *mujahidin* military academy in Afghanistan, and lived and taught at an Islamic school in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. Imron expressed his intention to do jihad and received a positive response from his brother, so he left for Malaysia. Soon after his arrival, his brother arranged for his departure to Afghanistan and introduced him to Abdullah Sungkar, a leader of *Daarul Islam* (DI, the Indonesian Islamic group that aspires to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia), who provided the funding for the travel. Before his departure Imron had to attend a series of lectures from Sungkar and eventually made an oath (*bai'at*) to join the organisation. Thus began his formal involvement in the terror organization.

However, Imron's motivation was not only to gain an opportunity to fight foreign forces, but also to study overseas like his brother Ali Ghufron. Imron recalls what he said to his brother when he met him in Joho Bahru in 1992:

I was so happy meeting Ali Ghufron because it was already six years since we separated, and he was the closest to me compared to my other brothers. I immediately stated my wish to study at the place where he used to study i.e. in Afghanistan. A week later he told me that, God willing, my wish would be granted (Imron 2005, 5).

Increased involvement subject to opportunity, pacing and progression

Ali Imron does not seem to have had too many difficult difficulties progressing to the next level of his involvement thanks to his brother Ali Ghufron. Imron's dream of becoming involved in jihad against the enemy of Islam and Muslims was a step closer. He departed for Afghanistan accompanied by an emir and a guide named Ismail. Imron was taken to Peshawar and later to Pabbi in Afghanistan, where Dzulqarnain managed fighters from Southeast Asian countries (Dzulqarnain gave him a pseudonym Zaid). Imron was then taken to the Mujahidin Military Academy in Sadda Parachinar, in Pakistani territory and in early October 1991 he began his training. Other trainees from Southeast Asia included 18 from Indonesia such as Imam Samudra, Umar Patek, and Abu Ayub. They were trained by Indonesians with the exception of Nasir Abas, a Malaysian, and a former Head of Mantiqi III (the JI Territorial Unit including Johor Bahru and Borneo). Nasir Abas disengaged from JI after his release from jail in Indonesia a few years ago.

Imron was taught military skills training including weapon training, military tactics and strategy, field engineering, map reading, bomb making etc. He was also given religious lessons. At this stage his intention was not to commit terrorist activities because the purpose of the training was 'idad' (to prepare for a war). Imron's goal was still to join the fight against foreign forces occupying Muslim nations or local governments installed by foreign powers. He particularly wanted to join the fight in Afghanistan:

about December 1991 we had reached the middle of our first year training and it was time for a holiday. Traditionally, during the holiday senior students were sent to war. We also wished to be among those sent to war. Some of my classmates had left the academy to join the war. However, the Communist Government led by Najibullah had been toppled by mujahidin (jihadist fighters), so some of the colleagues who had left had to return. The failure to join the war made us sad because we did not get the chance to fight (Imron 2006, 16)

However, for his sponsors (in particular Abdullah Sungkar), the motivation may have been different. As mentioned earlier, before his departure Abdullah Sungkar was a leader of the DI, which aspires to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. However, in 1993 Abdullah Sungkar exited DI and established the *Jemaah Islamyah* (JI), which had a broader aspiration i.e. to establish an Islamic government in Southeast Asia, carving the region into three territorial units called 'Mantiqi'. Imron chose to join the Sungkar JI as Abdullah Sungkar had sponsored his study in Afghanistan. This juncture marked the beginning of his involvement in JI, although he did not have to make another oath.

The Military Academy was moved to Kabul, but Imron and the other students and staff from Southeast Asia joined another camp owned by the Southeast Asian Group in Towrkham, Nangrahar Province, Afghanistan, commanded by Mustafa. There was also another Southeast Asian camp in this area. Both were owned by "Tanzim Ittihad Islami Afghanistan", and led by Abdur Robbi Rosul Sayyaf. (It is not clear whether Rasul Sayyaf had any connection with Abu Sayyaf Group of the South Philippines). Imron could not join the final exam at this camp, however, as he had to be transferred to another camp for weapon reloading training. After 1994, Imron moved to another camp, which had been vacated by a Libyan contingent, where he and his colleagues learned new skills from Abu Syaikh including poison formulation and the construction of poison bombs. In 1995 Imron moved to Pabbi, Peshawar, to join with Abu Dujanah, Saat Al-Ghazi, and Sobih, who stayed at the Southeast Asian Office; this marked the end of Imron's training.

Although it is unclear whether he received any training certification (recall that Imron did not attend the final exam), it appears that he was now considered a 'graduate' ready to undertake tasks for the JI. As a graduate, Imron had acquired specific military skills and religious knowledge to prepare for his future assignments. As an unmarried man, he had no family commitments to worry about. In the context of community support, it is clear that Imron was respected by the Muslim community in his hometown in Tenggulun, East Java, having trained abroad and probably believed to have participated in 'jihad' in Afghanistan. Imron faced no problem when assigned to teach at the (then) newly established Al Mukmin Pesantren, and his students were very fond of his jihad teaching, wishing to join fighting in Chechnya. However, Imron had not acquired (or been subject to) other forms of terrorist knowledge such as previous experience of violence, being victimised by the enemy, and/or having a good operational knowledge of JI (Imron 2005, 28-29). The Indonesian context differed from Palestine and Northern Ireland which were occupied and religious and nationalist aspirations suppressed by foreign forces. Nevertheless, it was clear that as a member of JI, whose training in Afghanistan had been sponsored by JI, the leadership expected Imron to act according to their wishes.

Subsequent Assignments

About two months after his return to Malaysia in 1996, Imron was sent to Sabah in Borneo by a senior member of JI named Dzulqarnain, also an Afghan graduate who was in charge of managing alumni from the Military Academy in Afghanistan. Imron was sent to Sabah in preparation for planned assignments in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. He stayed at the same accommodation traditionally used by JI members en route to the region. However, perhaps due to security problems in Mindanao, Imron was allowed to return to his hometown Tenggulun. Two months later Dzulqarnain reassigned him to Pontianak, Kalimantan, to survey the border between Indonesia and Malaysian territories. Imron and his colleague were keen to go to Mindanao to fight for the Moro Muslims, but acquiesced to the re-assignment. However, two months later he was reassigned again to teach the Al Mukmin Pesantren, at Tenggulun, (perhaps to educate and train future fighters). Imron was reluctant to undertake the teaching position as he was militarily trained although he again followed the order (Imron 2005, 31).

At the pesantren Imron encouraged his students to exercise jihad, which was well-received. A large number of his new graduates wished to be sent to a war zone. In fact, he managed to boost the enthusiasm of some of his students to the extent that two of them wished to be sent to Chechnya using their own (parents') funds. Imron was active not only in educating his students, but also in activities he and other JI members organised in East Java. Although his formal status was that of teacher of a pesantren he was given other assignments by the JI leadership. One of these tasks was to collect weapons, which he was instructed to do by Dzulqarnain in 1998. The following year he was instructed to go to Ambon to assist Muslims in war against Christian fighters.

Imron claims that at this stage in his career he still did not know details of the JI structure and leadership, nor did he want to (Imron 2005, 33). Although he knew about the (natural) death of Abdullah Sungkar in 1999 in Bogor, and his subsequent replacement by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Imron claims that he was not involved in disputes about Ba'asyir's appointment.

Phase 2: Being a Terrorist

Imron's first involvement in terrorist acts was the bombing of the Philippines Ambassador's residence on 1 August 2000, and then the bombing of the Atrium Shopping Centre in Jakarta the same year. However, his involvement was only indirect and at the pre-terrorism stage, in that he helped obtain explosive materials. In relation to the Ambassador's residence bombing, Imron and his brother Amrozi also helped find the car (a Suzuki Carry) used in the bombing. Imron doesn't reveal much about either terrorist act as he was not directly involved in Stages 1 and 2 of the execution of the bombings. These were planned and carried out by operatives in Jakarta. However, Imron was directly involved in the church bombings of 24 December 2000 in Mojokerto, East Java, and in BB1 on 12 October 2002.

The Church Bombing Incidents, 2000

The bombing of the churches in 2000 was well planned; this started with the visit to Surabaya by Ridhuan Isamuddin, alias Hambali, a senior figure in JI and a former Head of Mantiqi III. Imron, Amrozi and Mubarak were summoned by Hambali to the Hotel Mesir in Surabaya. On arrival, Hambali lectured them on the sufferings and deaths of Muslims in many parts of the world at the hands of the “infidels” (Christians); he said it was time to avenge their deaths and sufferings. Because Muslims in Ambon had been killed during “*Idul fitri*” (the celebration of end of Ramadhan), Hambali believed that they should kill Christians during their Christmas celebration by bombing churches. He delegated the responsibility to prepare and execute the plan to Amrozi, Mubarak and Imron. He also gave them money to cover the costs of the operation. But Hambali was still involved in the initial selection of the target. They discussed the target at length and made careful surveys of the sites. The potential targets included churches in Surabaya, Mojokerto, Jombang, Bojonegoro and Tuban, all in East Java. Surabaya was excluded from their plans due to difficulties involved in purchasing bomb materials such as fertilizer, detonators, and sulphur locally. Mojokerto, on the other hand, was an ideal choice because it had a high density of Christian churches. Ali Imron, Hambali, Amrozi and Mubarak surveyed the town before Hambali was taken to the Juanda Airport (his destination is not clear). The other three reconsidered targets and, in the process, surveyed churches in other towns, but eventually they decided to pursue the initial choice. Three targets were selected: the Bethani, Allah Baik, and Eben Heizer churches. A total of six operatives (Ali Imron, Amrozi, Mubarak, Sawad, Salman and Muhajir) were to bomb each of the three targets, a pair being responsible for each. The target selection was politically symbolic as it reflected their desire to avenge the killing of Muslims, particularly in Ambon.

BB1, 2002

The BB1 was a much bigger operation and took a larger team significantly longer to prepare (from August to 11 October 2002). The coordinator of the project was Imam Samudra. It was not clear when he decided to target Bali, but Imron mentions that Imam Samudra had signalled this intention to him five months earlier. Imron mentions a first meeting at Johnny Hendrawan’s (alias Idris) rented house in Solo in the middle of August 2002, but according to Imam Samudra three meetings were held (Adisaputra 2006, 57).¹ The first meeting that Imron refers to was attended by nine JI activists (Imam Samudra, Idris, Ali Ghufon, Amrozi, Dul Matin, Umar Patek, Sawad, Abdul Ghani and Ali Imron). Ali Ghufon began the meeting by stressing the need for *jihad* against the USA and its allies and announced that Imam Samudra was the Project Leader. Imam Samudra explained that Bali was selected because many Westerners took their holidays there, notably tourists from the United States and its allies, and the purpose was to commemorate the World Trade Centre attack on 9 September 2001. No specific target was decided as survey operations needed to be undertaken in Bali. Nevertheless, the target clearly was political.

BB1 was preceded by sophisticated preparation work. JI planned to explode a car bomb containing one tonne of explosive, a motorbike bomb containing fifty kilograms, and suicide bombers armed with explosive vests. Amrozi and his brother Imron were tasked to buy explosive materials, detonation cords and detonation switches, and forwarded these to Bali in small quantities. Amrozi

¹ According to Imam Samudra, the other two meetings were held in Amrozi’s car, first in front of Pabelan Petrol Station and attended only by three people (Amrozi, Johnny Hendrawan and himself as the mastermind), and the second one was around Klewer Market attended by four people (Amrozi, Abdul Matin, Johnny Hendrawan, and himself). The third meeting was at Johnny Hendrawan’s place and attended by six people (Abdul Rauf, Agus, Amin, Iqbal, Yudi, himself). Imron’s and Ali Ghufon’s name were not mentioned at all. However, this version of event was based on a police investigation report produced before Imam Samudra’s trials, so he might have avoided implicating the two. Imron’s version seems to be more accurate because it was written after more evidence came out at the trials. Nevertheless, Imam Samudra’s account of event contains more information, indicating he was the mastermind of the BB1.

and Ali Imron also had to find a vehicle to carry the explosives, modify it appropriately, and remove its identity numbers; Dul Matin, Umar Patek, Abdul Ghani and Sawad were charged with making the bombs, while Idris managed the funding and provided food, vehicles and accommodation for the team members while they were in Bali. The bomb making team was later completed with the addition of Dr. Azahari bin Husin, a Malaysian academic and a bomb making expert (killed in the city of Malang, East Java, in a shootout with Indonesian police on 9 November 2005). Candidates for the suicide bombing task were prepared (Abdul Rauf, Jimmi, Junaidi, and Agus) but only two agreed to go ahead with this option in the first instance.

Imron and Amrozi returned to Tenggulun and waited to receive money from Imam Samudra to purchase bomb materials and a vehicle. Upon receipt of funds they purchased an L300 Mitsubishi van and a ton of fertilizer in Surabaya. The car van was modified to increase carrying capacity and a false registration number was affixed to avoid detection. The bomb materials were later sent to Bali in small quantities.

Stage 2: Preparation or “pre-terrorist activity”

Identification and surveillance of target, including an assessment of risk

This stage began on 8 September when the core team members Imam Samudra, Dul Matin, and Idris visited Amrozi, Mubarak and Ali Imron to ask them to travel to Bali to start surveying possible targets. The latter travelled around Kuta and the Sari Club was the first potential target to attract their attention. The next day they continued the survey at Kuta and Sanur beaches and streets. Imam Samudra and Imron continued this work after the rest of the team members had been ordered by Imam Samudra to return to Java to continue their respective tasks. Samudra told Imron to buy a motorbike to assist their surveillance activities. Surveillance was undertaken in disguise (wearing Western style of clothes and sitting at the Kuta beach among foreign [Western] tourists, and around cafes, discos, and nightclubs. Imron even coloured his hair blond to avoid suspicion). They also played Western songs in their car and at their rented house while making bombs, although this tactic created a conflict between members who opposed it (due to its un-Islamic nature) and those who supported it in an attempt to avoid suspicion from the public or security officers.

Identification and selection of personnel

The initial identification and selection of personnel was conducted in the Solo meeting, but the final decision took place in Bali. Out of the five people prepared to be suicide bombers, only two were finally selected by Imam Samudra, namely Iqbal alias Isa alias Ferri, and Jimmy alias Acong alias Arnasan. The rest of the candidates and the other members of the bomb making team were ordered to leave Bali before the bombing. Iqbal was selected for his strong commitment to *jihad*; he also had experience in fighting in the Maluku. Jimmi was selected for his bravery: he had been a *preman* (criminal) at Malimping market, his hometown in West Java, and had proven his bravery in a successful robbery of a Chinese jewellery shop in Serang, a town in West Java. Iqbal was assigned to detonate a vest bomb and Jimmy was to detonate the car bomb. Imron, who was not initially included in the project, had to play a key role in installing detonation cords and switches, teaching the suicide bombers how to operate the bombs, and eventually in driving the bomb car close to the target because Jimmy could not drive well. Imron also had to place a bomb at the American Consulate in Denpasar shortly before he drove Iqbal and Jimmy to Paddy’s Club.

Training requirements including general preparation and specific target requirements

Training can be defined in terms of developing the skills to making and exploding bombs. The former skills were acquired during study in Afghanistan and additional expertise was provided by Abdul Ghani, Umar Patek, and Dr. Azahari. Imron was ordered to teach the suicide bombers how to activate their explosive devices.

Designing, constructing and manufacturing the required equipment

As noted earlier, instead of three suicide bombers being deployed, JI decided to use only two. The reason for the change was that the planned motorbike bomb was changed to a bag bomb to be placed at the American Consulate Building. The final three bombs (car bomb, bag bomb and vest bombs) were designed and constructed by a team directed by Dr. Azahari, with Abdul Ghani, Abdul Matin or Dul Matin and Umar Patek, at a rented house at Pulau. The car bomb was constructed with eight plastic filing cabinets placed in the L300 Mitsubishi van they brought from Tenggulun. Each was filled with explosive “black powder” (a mixture of fertilizer, aluminium powder and sulphur). Imron made detonation cords while firing devices were made by Abdul Matin. The bag bomb consisted of a plastic box filled with explosive and detonated with a remote control triggered by a mobile phone call.

Stage 3: Event execution

Readying the logistics and the personnel for the act

On 11 October 2002 Azahari and his team completed the bombs with the exception of the detonators, which were left to Imron to install. Azahari and Umar Patek left Bali later in the afternoon. Imron, Amrozi and Johnny Hendrawan alias Idris bought a new motorbike for a final surveillance, the placement of the bag bomb and escape. At ten pm he was instructed by the leader (Imam Samudra) to take the two suicide bombers (Jimmi and Iqbal) to the target area for a rehearsal, while Umar Patek and Abdul Ghani were cleaning their rented house of any traces of the bomb construction materials. At about 8am on the execution day (12 October 2002) these two bomb makers also left for Java. This left Imron, Amrozi, Imam Samudra, Johnny Hendrawan, and the two suicide bombers. Around 10am Imron installed 3 switches on the motorbike: one for turning the engine on and off; one for switching the brake lights; and the last for switching the tail light. These switches were to be used as a decoy when dropping the bag bomb at the USA Consulate.

At about 1pm Imron showed the two suicide bombers how the firing devices worked and how to activate them. He then described the scenario of the bombing, and reported to his leader. At 8pm Imron managed to place the remotely controlled bag bomb on the footpath outside the United States’ Consulate, despite the presence of police officers near the roundabout in front of the building. Then he conducted a final surveillance at the Sari Club which he saw was crowded before returning to the rented house, where Idris and the two suicide bombers were ready. Imron and the latter took the loaded L300 van and drove to Legian Street, not far from Sari Club; Idris followed on the motorbike at a distance, and later waited near Legian Street. On the way to the target, Imron instructed the bombers to prepare their respective bombs. About 50 meters from the target, he asked Jimmi to drive closer to the target while Imron walked away to where Idris was waiting. From this position Imron saw Jimmi enter Paddy’s Club to detonate his vest bomb among the crowd.

Thus the bombing was well planned and successfully executed although Imron and Idris were not careful in discarding their motorbike. They left it at Al Ghuraba Mosque in Bali where it was later found and provided a clue as to their identity (the Police traced the origins of the bike to a Yamaha showroom in Denpasar, from which they collected information about physical appearances. The information was then used to develop a flier which was widely publicised, and lead to the arrest of Amrozi at Tenggulun).

Stage 4: Post event activity and strategic analysis

This stage may include the following steps:

1. Escape

In his book Imron does not mention of any specific pre-execution plan to escape from Bali. After dropping Iqbal and Jimmi near Paddy’s Club, Imron and Idris sped away towards Ubung Bus

Terminal. On the way, Imron remembered the bag bomb he had left at the United States Consulate, so he stopped and remotely detonated it using a mobile phone. A minute later he heard the explosion of the car bomb at the Sari Club. Imron and Idris drove for some before eventually reporting to Imam Samudra, and later discussed with the latter their planned escape from Bali. The men decided to via different routes at different times, but all ended up travelling by public bus to Surabaya. Despite police inspections of vehicles at Gilimanuk Ferry Port (but not Imron's bus), he escaped from Bali (Imron 2005, 107).

2. Elimination of evidence.

Elimination of evidence had begun in the preparation process (for example, when Amrozi told Imron to remove identification number of the L300 van soon after he bought it in Tenggulun); later, in Bali, they also removed the identification numbers of the motorbikes used during the preparation phase, and Imron told Idris to remove any trace of the bomb making materials from the rented premises. Imron and Amrozi also relocated all the weapons and bomb materials they had stored at the Al Islam Pesantren compound to a safer place in anticipation of a future investigation by police. However, as mentioned earlier, Imron and Idris were somewhat careless in disposing the motorbike they used to escape (by leaving it at the Al Ghuraba Mosque).

3. Post event evaluation

An evaluation meeting was conducted in Solo, at Abdul Matin's rented house, where the JI members originally had planned the bombing. In this meeting they expressed appreciation to Allah for the success of the BB1 execution, and perhaps planned future moves, but Imron doesn't detail them in his book. However, he does mention that the meeting failed to discuss two crucial points, i.e. what action was to be taken in the event of one of them was arrested, and what answers should be given to interrogators should that even occur.

Phase 3. Disengagement from Terrorism

It appears that Imron intends to disengage from Imam Samudra's version of *jihad*, but not necessarily from JI (of which he is not critical). He renounces Imam Samudra's version of *jihad* because it allows indiscriminate attacks against any enemy targets including innocent civilians, women and children. Imron says "In my view, doing jihad as in the Bali bombing must be stopped and prevented" (Imron 2005, 177). He sees such activity as attracting more "mudharat" (negative effects) than mafsadat (positive effects) which, according to Sunni legal maxim (*ushul fiqh*) as defined by Sunni jurist Al Mawardi (Maarif 1987), should be avoided. In this view, referring to the BB1 as a test case, such a form of *jihad* was unjustified for nine reasons: (1) it broke the formal sequence of the steps of *jihad*; (2) it was indiscriminate; (3) it was motivated by the desire take a revenge; (4) there was no (political) authority to seek protection from after the bombing; (5) it created enemies; (6) there was no open support from the rest of the Muslim community in Indonesia; (7) it used suicide bombers without an adequate justification; (8) there was an inadequate period of planning before the attack; and (9), the group lacked a leader who was supported and obeyed by every member of the group. Imron refers to tensions and conflicts between members of the group (for example, between Dul Matin and Imam Samudra, and between those who favoured playing Western songs in their car and those who objected to it). The factors that influenced Imron's disengagement also match most of those mentioned by Horgan (2005).

Emergence of seeds of psychological disengagement

Imron's seeds of psychological disengagement began when he started to question the justification for bombing churches in 2000. He was confused and suffered from intense mental pressures from outside his group when many people, including Muslims, renounced the bombing. Even Imron himself renounced the bombings in his speeches in front of Muslim audiences. As mentioned earlier he also questioned BB1. However, because he was just a junior member of the group, he did not

make his qualms known to the leadership. The widespread outcry after BB1 led the Indonesian government security apparatus to step up the hunt for the perpetrators, and following the arrest of Amrozi the group was in disarray. Each of the members had to escape to different parts of the country. Imron went from being a respected teacher in the Al Islam Pesantren and surrounding communities to a fugitive who was eventually arrested in a hut at Kuala Bengkuang on the mouth of the Mahakam River. His psychological stress increased after he found out that everyone of his group and those who helped him during his escape had been detained:

The arrest of Amrozi, Imam Samudra and Ali Ghufron as well as his (their) other friends incurred a heavy pressure on me. When I was also arrested the pressure became heavier especially after I found out that many of my friends were also arrested because they helped me during my escape attempt. (Imron 2005, 175)

I found out that many more people were arrested simply for helping me. ... I had to see my two older brothers Amrozi and Ali Ghufron caged in Bali Police Detention, led out while cuffed, and guarded by two policemen on the left and right. I was so hurting that I did not look at them passing in front of me because I could not stand seeing them in that situation (Imron 2005, 176).

This intense stress eventually led to his change of mind and Imron called on his brethren to abandon terror attacks as in Bali:

So since then I wished to call on my comrades who were involved in the Bali (one) bombing to discourage other comrades from doing jihad by bombing as we did in Bali. The disaster that we experienced is enough as a sign and lesson that doing jihad as in the Bali bombing is not correct (Imron 2005, 177).

Physical disengagement

There is obviously an element of physical disengagement in this case, albeit involuntary, as Imron moved from one place to another during while hiding; after arrest he was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Occurrence of organizational issues

Imron might have suffered from financial problems during his escape, but appears to have been more affected by the dramatic change in the Indonesian government's attitude to terrorism in response to intense international political pressure.

Prospects after leaving

Imron held a respected position as teacher in Pesantren Al Islam in Tenggulun. As a teacher, he enjoyed a relatively high social status in the local community. Although now a convicted terrorist facing a long period of incarceration, it is difficult to predict community attitudes to Imron should he be released at some stage in the future as community attitudes change over time. For example, Asfar *et al.* (2003, 125) found that the community's attitude in Tenggulun to BB1 changed from 'antipathy' to 'sympathy' after the invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies.

Discussion

This article seeks to understand terrorism in Indonesia through the life story of Ali Imron using the Process Model, and to assess the applicability of the model. The analysis suggests that terrorism is a complex phenomenon that involves multiple factors. Imron's story supports the Process Model's assumption that the motivation in joining the terror group was different from the motivation for participating in terrorist acts. Imron's motivation for conducting terrorist acts in Mojokerto (the church

bombings) and in his involvement in BB1 were also different: in Mojokerto it was to avenge the killing of Muslims in Ambon; in Bali he was to some extent coerced into participation by his brother and the operational group. Initially Imron wanted to fight against foreign troops in Afghanistan (which has a clear justification in the Koran) and gain the opportunity to study overseas, not bomb civilian targets in Indonesia. Imron obviously did not know that he would join JI when he first left Tenggulun as JI did not exist then; it seems that he did not even know that the oath he made in front of Sungkar before departing from Johor Bahru was an oath to join DI (Imron only realised this after he had arrived in Afghanistan). Even following the formation of JI Imron did know that he would eventually be involved in the bombing of civilian targets. Note that the JI central leadership was not fully involved in the Bali Bombing. It was masterminded by a small younger group within the organisation, particularly Imam Samudra, Ali Ghufron, and Amrozi (Abuza 2007). PUPJI, the ideology of JI itself does not condone terrorist acts like bombing civilian targets although it justifies the use of military force to form an Islamic state (Abuza 2007).

Although Imron ultimately was involved in the attacks on civilian targets, his involvement seems to have been motivated by group solidarity rather than his own initiative. “The bombing of churches was not my idea although I was one of the perpetrators” (Imron 2005, 254). He appears to have been reluctant to join similar operations after the Mojokerto church bombings, an operation which was masterminded and funded by Hambali. Although Imron was hoping for a “battlefield between good and evil” (Imron 2005, 255) in which to fight in Indonesia in the name of *jihad*, nonetheless, he did tell Ali Ghufron prior to BB1 that bombing civilian targets would harm JI’s development. Ali Ghufron agreed, but he later changed his mind and proceeded with plans to bomb targets in Bali.

Maybe Ali Ghufron had learned from what happened to our brethren in Malaysia [arrest] and to Pesantren Luqmanul Hakim in Johor Bahru [being closed down], as when he came to Tenggulun he called us to a meeting and decided that Mubarak and I had to concentrate on the Al-Islam Pesantren at Tenggulun, and he would not include us in future terror acts such as church bombings. But not long after the decision was made, Ali Ghufron involved us in the Bali (One) bombing (Imron 2005, 256-57).

Despite his reluctance to attack civilian targets, Imron joined the BB1 operation as he felt he “had to follow the group’s decision based on group solidarity: (Imron 2005, 257).

Imron’s account accords with the Process Model’s supposition that terrorism is essentially done in group context and individual behaviour is subordinated to the group. It also lends some support to Barton’s (2005) and Sageman’s (2004) conclusion that family and friend networks are an important factor in understanding terrorism in Indonesia. Recall that Imron went to Malaysia and then to Afghanistan because he already had a brother there, and later got involved in terrorist acts (BB1) because his brother requested his involvement. However, there is no information on Imron’s family relationship with Iqbal, whom he met only in Bali (Imron 2005, 110).

Therefore, it is simplistic to argue that JI ideology solely motivates regional terrorism. It might be argued that Imron has concocted a biography to gain a possible reduction in his jail sentence, but his story seems to have at some credibility as a narrative of a junior JI operative. Imron’s reason for becoming involved in *jihad* in the first place also supports Pape’s (2005) theory of terrorism, but not necessarily his subsequent reasons for involvement in BB1. In this context his brother Ali Ghufron was the most pressing influence. For example, Imron only agreed to stay in Bali to conduct the initial target surveys instead of going back to Tenggulun (where he had to prepare for his students’ exam) because Imam Samudra told him that Ali Ghufron had agreed that he should stay. Imron’s questioning of the need to bomb Bali, the mental stress that he suffered upon seeing his brothers being handcuffed and otherwise humiliated led to his decision to renounce terrorism, and suggests that he was not overwhelmingly influenced by Imam Samudra’s interpretation of *jihad* (which allows indiscriminate killings of civilians in Indonesia). This is why, perhaps, it was easier for Imron to disengage and renounce Imam Samudra’s interpretation of *jihad* than is apparently the case with the other perpetrators.

Generally speaking, the Process Model helps capture important aspects of Imron's life: i.e. how and why he got involved in terrorist activity; how and why he progressed in the group(s); and how and why decided to renounce terrorism. The only important aspect of Imron's experience that the model cannot account for is how his interpretation of *jihad* changed from the time he was involved in terrorism to when he wrote his autobiography. Imron says that

I was one of the perpetrators of the (terror) acts, but after seeing and experiencing the impact of BB1, I began to study rigorously BB1 and similar acts in order to review them. I did the review in order to improve my own personal understanding and (way of) thinking so that other people can learn from it and avoid similar mistakes (Imron 2005, 213).

Horgan's model does not account for this way of thinking.

Imron's experiences demonstrate the insights to be gained from applying Horgan's Process Model to the Indonesian terrorist context. This approach could also be applied to a wider range of individual terrorists and, in addition to memoirs, the research methodology could draw on interviews and focus group discussions. Further research might reveal common patterns and trends which could be used to develop a new model based on Indonesian context.

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