

La Toya Waha [ed.]

# United by Violence, Divided by Cause?

A Comparison of Drivers of Radicalisation  
and Violence in Asia and Europe

With a Foreword by Christian Echle



**Nomos**

<https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748905738>, am 18.09.2024, 16:33:44  
Open Access –  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb>



**KONRAD  
ADENAUER  
STIFTUNG**



La Toya Waha [ed.]

# United by Violence, Divided by Cause?

**A Comparison of Drivers of Radicalisation  
and Violence in Asia and Europe**

With a Foreword by Christian Echle



**Nomos**



**The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek** lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

ISBN 978-3-8487-6449-5 (Print)  
978-3-7489-0573-8 (ePDF)

**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-3-8487-6449-5 (Print)  
978-3-7489-0573-8 (ePDF)

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Waha, La Toya

United by Violence, Divided by Cause?

A Comparison of Drivers of Radicalisation and Violence in Asia and Europe

With a Foreword by Christian Echle

La Toya Waha (ed.)

223 pp.

Includes bibliographic references and index.

ISBN 978-3-8487-6449-5 (Print)  
978-3-7489-0573-8 (ePDF)

1st Edition 2020

© La Toya Waha / Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Published by

Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG

Waldseestraße 3-5 | 76530 Baden-Baden

[www.nomos.de](http://www.nomos.de)

Production of the printed version:

Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG

Waldseestraße 3-5 | 76530 Baden-Baden

Printed and bound in Germany.

ISBN (Print): 978-3-8487-6449-5

ISBN (ePDF): 978-3-7489-0573-8

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748905738>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution  
– Non Commercial – No Derivations 4.0 International License.



Onlineversion  
Nomos eLibrary

## About the Contributors

Professor Dr. *Greg Barton* is Professor of Global Islamic Politics at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.

Professor *D. Suba Chandran* (PhD) is Professor and Dean at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, India.

Professor Dr. *Aurel Croissant* is Professor and Dean at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Heidelberg University, Germany.

*Christian Echle* is Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia in Singapore.

Professor *Rohan Gunaratna* is Professor of Security Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Dr. *Khuram Iqbal* is Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, National Defense University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Professor *Kevin McDonald* is Professor of Sociology and Head at the Department of Criminology and Sociology, Middlesex University, London, United Kingdom.

Professor *Subrata K. Mitra* PhD (Rochester) is emeritus Professor of South Asian and Comparative Politics at Heidelberg University, Germany.

*Serina Rahman* (PhD) is Visiting Fellow at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.

Dr. *La Toya Waha* is Deputy Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia in Singapore.



## Foreword

Germany has experienced various forms of terrorism over the past 50 years, starting with the left-wing extremist attacks of the Red Army Faction since the 1970s, followed by right-wing extremist acts since the 1990s, and the threat of Islamist terror after the attack on the World Trade Center, and its actual appearance in a series of Islamist attacks since the 2010s. Throughout these five decades, security authorities had to adapt to new groups of perpetrators and different *modi operandi* in their fight against violent extremism. After the end of the Cold War, terror has become one of the world's greatest challenges to security and social cohesion, regardless of whether the attacks are carried out in the name of religion, ethnicity or ideology. The consequential changes in the global security architecture, which particularly concern dealing with non-state actors, were accompanied by large and sometimes painful learning processes and have not been completed to date, as the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan shows.

It took humankind centuries of war to develop a martial law which guides violent conflicts and makes war the domain of states. One of its core principles became the greatest possible protection of the civilian population. Even if the institutions which are to uphold these principles have been weakened over the last few years, there is a general understanding about the nature of war crimes and how to prosecute them. In stark contrast, the fight against terrorism seems to lack any globally acknowledged rules. There is no formal way to end a violent confrontation between a network of terrorists and a nation state, and no international body that could help facilitate negotiations. Many demands of terrorist networks are at best vague and can never be realised in a globalised world or democratic societies. While some of the emerging threats to global security – like cyber warfare – have to be met – at least partially – by a set of new rules which contains these threats' destructive potential, this is not an option for terrorism.

Terrorists are arbitrary in their choice of tools as long as they can create the highest possible level of fear and insecurity in society. Their victims have nothing in common but to belong to a group of "others" – be it alien in belief, in ethnicity or in ideology. This is true for the attacks on churches and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday in April 2019 as much as for the attack on mosques in New Zealand during Friday prayers, a month earlier. Both acts are exemplifying the blind hatred and brutality of

terrorist attacks, often combined with the willingness to die for one's own convictions. They were carried out in the name of very different ideologies. Nevertheless, the question arises: Are there connections in the respective radicalisation processes whose identification could enable us to better understand radicalisation per se? And would these connections allow us to recognise the process of radicalisation at an earlier stage, or even to prevent it?

Looking at the public discourse, this question has so far only been partially answered. From a purely demographic point of view, it is certainly true that men between 20 and 40 years of age are most susceptible to radicalisation. But the role of women – especially in financing terrorist activities and recruiting new members for the networks – is rightfully receiving more attention in recent research in this area. Lack of perspective and experiences of exclusion are widely regarded as important factors in the radicalisation process. However, this does not explain the terrorist activities of materially well-equipped actors from the upper middle class as in the Easter attacks in Sri Lanka or the Islamist terror acts in the Muslim majority societies in Indonesia and Malaysia. Last but not least, the role of the internet in its various possible uses, from recruitment and reinforcement to the organisation and distribution of acts of violence, does not seem to have been sufficiently researched.

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung has been addressing all these aspects with its “Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia” for several years, especially on the platform of the “Counter Terrorism Dialogue Asia Europe”. Since 2015, this format has brought together representatives of security agencies and ministries from both world regions who are involved in the fight against terrorism and the prevention of violence. The exchange promotes the mutual understanding and trust that is necessary in order to effectively counter global terrorist networks. In addition, the format gives the opportunity to present particularly interesting case studies, such as the successful reintegration of radicalised criminals in Singapore, to a broader audience.

At the same time, this dialogue also shows how difficult it is to combat globally organised terror. The competences and capacities of the respective authorities differ not only strikingly between Europe and Asia, but sometimes also within the same region. Security agencies often find it difficult to share relevant information with other countries, or to classify the information received from other countries as valid and important.

In quite a few cases, politically motivated narratives furthermore prevent a closer examination of the real causes of radicalisation. This can be observed in some Asian countries, where governments are trying to play down the influence of extreme Islamist forces within their societies, but



can also be said for Europe, where some countries have underestimated the radicalisation of right-wing and left-wing extremists for a long time.

In order to address these challenges, a complementary new approach was chosen for this publication. Researchers dealing with radicalisation processes and political violence in different disciplines and with a focus on a range of ideologies were invited to participate. The aim of the project is to identify commonalities in these processes and to provide basic research on the nature of radicalisation. In the long term, we hope that this will enable more targeted prevention measures that can be implemented across countries and regions in Europe and Asia. At the event in Singapore, the challenges of this approach became apparent when it was already challenging to find a common terminology for the processes described. But the effort is worth it, considered how complex the process of radicalisation is. Psychological, sociological, cultural and political influences can only be comprehensively understood if experts from the respective disciplines sit together at one table. I would therefore like to thank all participants and authors who have contributed their expertise and experience to this project. My special thanks go to Dr. La Toya Waha, who designed the project and drove it forward at the KAS Regional Programme in Singapore. It is my firm belief that the results of this publication provide concrete help for better dealing with the threat of terrorism and radicalisation, and in addition also provide a good basis for further interdisciplinary research projects in this area.

Singapore, 21 April 2020  
Christian Echle  
Director



## Acknowledgements

Putting together a book of this kind requires the support from distinguished scholars, but also the freedom to be creative and the resources to implement ideas.

This book builds on the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's long-standing effort to promote cooperation and exchange in the field of security and countering violent extremism and terrorism between Europe and Asia and many other parts of the world. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) is committed towards securing and increasing peace, freedom and prosperity in Europe and throughout the world, and this book shall be understood as an attempt to contribute to fulfilling this obligation. Without the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's global engagement for international cooperation and dialogue, this project would not have been possible.

I would like to thank Christian Echle, Director of KAS Political Dialogue Asia, for the freedom and trust he gave me to plan and conduct this project. Christian Echle engages indefatigably in furthering dialogue and understanding between stakeholders from Asia and Europe and thereby has an openness for opinions and suggestions which is rare to find. I very much appreciate his manifold support for this project from the very beginning.

I am deeply grateful to the distinguished authors of this volume Prof. Kevin McDonald, Prof. Subrata K. Mitra, Prof. Aurel Croissant, Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, Prof. Greg Barton, Prof. D. Suba Chandran, Ass. Prof. Khuram Iqbal and Ass. Prof. Serina Abdul Rahman for their valuable contributions and for lending their invaluable expertise. I very much appreciate their great engagement in this project.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the participants of the conference and workshop "United by Violence, Divided by Cause?" held in Singapore in January 2020 for their great engagement and their splendid contributions. Much appreciation goes, besides the authors, to Aparupa Bhattacharjee, Prof. Mangalika de Silva, Clifford Geer, Dr. Malkanthi Hettiarachchi, Johannes Ebner, Prof. Soo Yeon Kim, Nauel Semaan, and Prof. Iqbal Singh Sevea.

I would like to particularly thank Aparupa Bhattacharjee and Prof. Iqbal Singh Sevea for chairing the panels as well as Prof. Soo Yeon Kim and Dr. Malkanthi Hettiarachchi for their session moderation. I would like to very much thank Prof. Mangalika de Silva for her talk "Sound, Space and the

## *Acknowledgements*

Violence of Silence: Heterotopias of Terror in Sri Lanka” and Johannes Ebner for his event rapport.

A special thanks goes to the KAS Political Dialogue Asia team in Singapore for their marvellous support and efforts in facilitating the conference and workshop. Particularly, I would like to thank Kanokporn Suriya, Linda K., Rubiah Mohammad, and, most of all, Kismet Abubakar for their great work.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Peter Fischer-Bollin and Nael Semaan from the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung’s Analysis and Consulting division in Berlin for their support.

Singapore, 21 April 2020  
Dr. La Toya Waha  
Editor

## Table of Contents

About the Contributors	5
Foreword	7
<i>Christian Echle</i>	
Acknowledgements	11
United by Violence, Divide by Cause?	15
<i>La Toya Waha</i>	

### ***Chapter I Between the Political and the Particular***

Jihadist and Far-Right Extremism: Subjectivity, Embodiment and Imaginaries of Violence	33
<i>Kevin McDonald</i>	
Frenzied Crowds, Radical Politics and Consolidation of Democracy: The Indian Puzzle	51
<i>Subrata K. Mitra</i>	
Radicalisation, Terrorism and Democratisation in Southeast Asia	71
<i>Aurel Croissant</i>	

### ***Chapter II Region and Radicalisation***

Contention, Escalation and Cycles of Vengeance: Reflections on the Global Threat Landscape	101
<i>Roban Gunaratna</i>	

*Table of Contents*

The Historical Context and Regional Social Network Dynamics of Radicalisation and Recruitment of Islamic State Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Indonesia and its Southeast Asian Neighbours 117  
*Greg Barton*

Radicalisation in South Asia: Left, Right and Secular 141  
*D. Suba Chandran*

***Chapter III The Global and the Local***

Trends of Contemporary Terrorism in Pakistan 155  
*Khuram Iqbal*

Malaysian Women and Islamic Radicalisation in the Home 177  
*Serina Rahman*

***Chapter IV Conclusion***

Comparing Violence in Asia and Europe – A Contribution to Solving a Complex Problem 207  
*La Toya Waba*

Index 219

# United by Violence, Divide by Cause?

*La Toya Waha*

This book is concerned with the diversity of violence in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Western Europe. It looks into the various forms of ideological backgrounds, structural conditions, relations and aims non-state actors involved in violence display in these regions and certain countries. Thereby, this book presents a similar diversity of theoretical and disciplinary approaches towards the explanation of the same phenomenon: violence. The rationale of this collection of approaches and case studies is to identify communalities on the one hand, and to counter simple, unidimensional explanations of why non-state actors resort to violence, on the other.

In the following, a short introduction into the puzzle underlying this endeavour is given. This is done on the example of the attacks on Christian churches and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka in April 2019. These attacks, which shocked not only the tiny island state south of India, but the world, due to its brutality, scope and suddenness, have inspired this book and the necessity to compare. After the introduction, the puzzle, aim, structure and background to this book are presented and the relevant concepts discussed.

*Sri Lanka, 21 April 2019*

On 21 April 2019, the news about a series of explosions in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo as well as in other cities of the island spread throughout the world. The targets of the attacks were Christian churches and luxury hotels. When the news reached Europe, dozens of people were dead, even more were injured.

When I heard the news in the radio, the attackers as well as their motives were yet unknown. Who could be behind the attacks?

Since the end of the Sri Lankan civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in 2009, the overt tensions between members of the Buddhist majority and the religious minorities increased. In 2012, for example, prominent Buddhist

monks have campaigned against Christian churches and Hindu temples, alleging them to be built on sacred Buddhist temple land, demanding their removal. Threats have been made against priests unwilling to give in to the demands. Although the modern history of Sri Lanka has frequently seen strained relations between Christians and Buddhists, among others due to the role Christian missionaries had played during the different phases of the island's colonisation and due to the political contention between Buddhist and Christian political elites after independence, the amplified engagement of US-sponsored evangelicals has fuelled conflict. During the raging civil war, several Buddhist groups and movements had emerged, whose political agenda included, among others, the prevention of what they called "unethical conversions" linked mainly to these evangelical groups (Deegalle 2006:244). Different bills against "unethical conversions", particularly by Christian groups, were introduced to parliamentary debate, but all were rejected (Matthews 2007:465). Since 2012, various members of these Buddhist movements and groups have formed new organisations, ever more resorting to radical means of protest, ranging from 'public awareness campaigns', symbolic violence like the throwing of pork meat on mosques, to physical attacks on religious houses and sometimes even members of other faiths (Waha 2018). The most notorious organisation thereby is – or due its proclaimed dissolving after the general elections 2020 maybe soon was<sup>1</sup> – the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS). This Buddhist monk-led organisation has developed into the most influential and capable contender of the notion of a multi-religious Sri Lankan society (Waha 2018). Its comparatively vast networks, links and resources suggested the BBS to be the only Buddhist organisation in the country with the potential capacities to launch a greater attack. Although radical Buddhist organisations are frequently presented as terrorists or, as the BBS's cooperation partner in Myanmar, Ashin Virathu as the Buddhist face of terror,<sup>2</sup> these April 2019 attacks appeared far too lethal and outrageous for the BBS to apply. And yet one could wonder: Had the BBS escalated now further?

The search through Sri Lanka's more violent organisations – and that it required a rather elaborate organisational structure for such a well-orchestrated campaign appeared likely – lead to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The JVP's political engagement had alternated between violent revolution, its preparation, and electoral participation as political party since its emergence in the 1960s. Its ideology combined elements of Marxism

---

1 The Daily Mirror, 20 November 2019.

2 Time, 01 July 2013.



with of a peculiar selection of parts of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism. Since 1968, the JVP trained students, members and members-to-be in its five lectures about what the leadership considered the downsides of capitalism, India's expansionism, true independence from British rule, the leftist movement as well as the correct path the Sri Lankan revolution should take (Gunaratna 1995:61). The JVP's major aim was the establishment of socialism in the country and the end of expansionism, imperialism and the attainment of what was claimed to be true independence. In 1971, with Rohana Wijeweera, the JVP's major leading figure, in prison, the organisation attempted the violent revolution to free its leader from imprisonment and the country from capitalism, imperialism and colonialism. While the JVP was able to take control over some rural areas and to establish state-like structures, the hoped-for mass uprising failed to happen (Samaranayake 2008:301). Despite the itself brutal defeat of the JVP in the same year, JVP's brutality and violence had incentivised the government to change the constitution, altering the country significantly, among others by turning it into a socialist republic and by providing Buddhism with the "foremost place".<sup>3</sup> In 1989, the JVP again tried to violently overthrow the government. Coordinated attacks on state institutions and police stations as well as on political opponents and politicians were characteristic for the JVP (Moore 1993). Similarly, the JVP strategically targeted and robbed wealthy civilians in their homes.<sup>4</sup> The JVP's indifference to differences in Christians – an ignorance shared by many radical Buddhists – and in 'Western people' as well as their enemy figure of wealthy people would have fit the selection of targets in the April 2019 attack: Christian churches and luxury hotels. While the JVP has returned to non-violent electoral politics already in the 1990s, just a few years after their brutal defeat in 1990, doubts remained in the Sri Lankan society about the JVP's final rejection of violence.<sup>5</sup> And indeed, an interview with a JVP-representative in June 2016 suggested that once the electoral support for the JVP would diminish

---

3 See the Sri Lankan constitution of 1972. This paragraph providing a special place for Buddhist by and in the state was kept when a new constitution was introduced in 1978. This constitution is valid until today as is the provision of Buddhism's special position.

4 Based on an unstructured interview conducted in Colombo in June 2016 with a person, who experienced such incidents in the neighbourhood and who described the fear and terror which followed from these experiences and news about them.

5 In 2001, C. A. Chandraprema wrote in one of Sri Lanka's leading newspapers, *The Island*, "The JVP today openly refers to the LTTE as terrorists while glossing over their own past. Not for a moment am I arguing that one should continue to harp on the JVP's past for all eternity. But what is a cause for concern is that while the

or once the government became more restrictive on them, the JVP might consider the return to violent revolution as an option to achieve political and social aims. Had the time come for the JVP to return to revolutionary struggle?

Heading the list of violent organisations in Sri Lanka, however, is surely the LTTE. The Tigers were one of the most elaborate terrorist organisations not only in Sri Lanka or South Asia, but in the world. The organisation had its roots in the growing political contention between Tamil and Sinhalese political elites about power in the 1970s. Its founder and – until his death in 2009 – undisputed leader was Velupillai Prabhakaran, who transformed his erstwhile youths gang into an elaborate and highly efficient organisation (Swamy 2003, Swamy 2010). The LTTE claimed to fight for a separate Tamil state, Tamil Eelam, in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. The capacity of the organisation enabled the LTTE not only to frequently defeat and severely challenge the Sri Lankan Army, but also to drive out the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) sent by the Indian government, which had formerly been supportive of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka and the LTTE (Gunaratna 1994). Even more, the LTTE brutally took out most of their political opponents within the Tamil community itself, ranging from the moderate Tamil politicians to the other militant Tamil organisations, which, just like the LTTE, had formed in the 1970s to fight for a separate state. Violence against the own community and opponents continued even as the LTTE had gained control of several parts of Sri Lanka and had established a functioning de-facto state. Through its networks all over Asia, Europe and Northern America, the LTTE received funds and political support (Chalk 2008), often willingly given but sometimes violently enforced, too. With suicide attacks and its military capacity on land, sea and air, the LTTE terrorised and killed its adversaries in large numbers. Victims include the former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, who was killed by a female suicide bomber – a Black Tigress – in 1991 (Pape 2006). Increasingly, too, their attacks became indifferent, as the Tigers turned away from selectively targeting members of police and military, and instead targeting ordinary citizens, particularly Muslims and Sin-

---

JVP continues to deny what happened in 1987-89, they exalt Wijeweera and the other mass murderers of the JVP's political bureau as martyrs. Candles are lit and songs are sung in their memory. This is as disconcerting for those who remember the JVP's terror campaign of 1987-89 as the sight of a neo-Nazi ceremony would be to an European of the older generation. So long as the JVP continues to regard their past leaders as martyrs, we should always regard the JVP as murderers". The Island, 23 November 2001.

halese-Buddhists. In 1990, for example, the LTTE has killed or driven out the whole Muslim population from the northern parts of the island and continued to harass the religious minority in the eastern parts of Sri Lanka until the organisation's defeat at the hands of the Sri Lankan Army in 2009 (Wickramasinghe 2014:302; McGilvray and Raheem 2011:413). Well-coordinated large-scale attacks on Buddhist religious institutions, on banks in Colombo and even on the international airport have killed and wounded hundreds of civilians. Most of the LTTE's leading figures and many cadres, yet, were killed in the final battles with the Sri Lankan Army in 2009. Since then, the LTTE is considered extinguished. However, those, who listen carefully to certain Tamil circles in Paris, Germany and Switzerland, might anticipate that against the many claims that the LTTE died with the leaders in 2009, the LTTE is ill, but alive. There appears to be growing evidence that the Tigers reconstitute. Was the April 2019 attack the LTTE's come-back?

While neither the BBS, the JVP, nor the LTTE appeared likely to be behind the attacks – if the BBS had at all seen a strategic use in such attacks, the BBS rather had targeted Muslims; if the JVP had returned to violence, strategic attacks on police and military would have preceded, if at all churches would have been targeted; and had the LTTE attacked, it least likely would have been Christian churches as many Christians are Tamils on the one hand, and less likely hotels frequented by Europeans and Americans, as the LTTE would prevent the needed political support from these countries, on which the LTTE has drawn earlier.<sup>6</sup> When the news arrived that suicide bombers had been used, BBS and JVP were finally out as suspects. While a Buddhist monk related to the BBS had burned himself to death in protest of certain minorities' disrespect for Buddhism in Sri Lanka, suicide bombing went far beyond any Buddhist repertoire (Waha 2018:481-518). While the LTTE had become a master of suicide bombings, the selection of targets still appeared not to fit.

The final suspect on the list was not as notorious as the others. Although by looking at transnational organisations of the kind, the selection of targets and repertoire would have fit, however, it was unclear whether one could *dare* the hypothesis. While Sri Lankan newspapers had frequently reported about incidents – such as the hacking to death of a Sufi, the

---

6 For LTTE's international links, "providing a sympathetic hearing, and in some cases (Norway, Switzerland) providing funding and support" see Burke and Mulakala (2011:158) and for an analysis of the LTTE's international network see Chalk (2008:98f.).

beweaponing of radical groups, or the attacks on Buddhist shrines and statues – many scholars and Sri Lankan politicians had either not taken up the issue of Muslim radicalisation, or rejected claims by those, who referred to such a development, as Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist.

And yet, when thinking about the April 2019 violence, the increasingly radicalising Muslim community came to mind. Not only had a good number of members of the Sunni Muslim community changed visibly, from a hardly optically distinguishable religious minority to a clearly distinguishable and ‘arabised’ community, but also had their political behaviour. The political change accompanied a trend of altering political and social loyalties. This started with the constitutional reform in 1978, which had incentivised the formation of an own solely-Muslim political party (Wickramasinghe 2014:166). Work-migration cycles to Middle Eastern countries and the invited funds from Muslim majoritarian countries to Sri Lanka’s Muslim majoritarian areas, which were followed by support in religious education, infrastructure and preaching, added to the transformation of the community (Waha 2018). The application of violence, however, followed the influx of aid organisations, most notably funded by Saudi Arabia, after the tsunami in 2004. In these years, groups like the Sri Lanka Jamthi Islam, Thableeq Jamath and different splinters of the Thauweed Jamath (Colombo based) as well as Knox, Ossama and the Jetty group (eastern Trincomalee district) formed.<sup>7</sup> Groups like these are suspected to be behind the defacing of Buddha statues as well as the destruction of Buddhist and Sufi shrines.<sup>8</sup> Increasingly they also targeted people, particularly the Sufi community. Some Sufis were driven away from their homes and others killed.<sup>9</sup> Particularly after the end of the civil war, furthermore, mutual provocations between members of the Muslim and other religious communities strained the communal relations. Hindus and Buddhists looked with suspicion at the changes within the Muslim community. Groups like the Bodu Bala Sena took their suspicion – and their rejection – to the streets. Frequently, radical Muslim groups, particularly the Sri Lanka Thauweed Jamath (SLTJ), clashed with members and supporters of the BBS. While some of the clashes remained widely verbal, like the threats exchanged in 2016 in the course of the adaption of the Muslim Marriage Law to human

---

7 Colombo Telegraph, 03 April 2013.

8 Already in 2001, an organisation had formed to ‘create awareness’ for the growing Muslim ‘terrorism’ (Waha 2018:273).

9 Asian Tribune, 01 September 2007.

rights standards,<sup>10</sup> others resulted in mass violence, destruction and deaths (Waha 2018:335,463). Despite reports about the escalation with particularly Buddhists, and to a far lower level Hindus, there was no escalation process between Christians and Muslims, which would suggest the selection of the target. And yet, already in the years before the attack, it appeared likely that such groups would perpetrate greater violence if elsewhere a conflict increased a ‘pan-Islamic threat perception’.<sup>11</sup> Could the attack in Christchurch have served as such? But still, it seemed that despite the known beweaponing of radical Muslim groups in the eastern part of Sri Lanka to fight the LTTE, these groups lacked the capacity – if not the financial resources, yet, at least the knowledge – to conduct such a large-scale and well-coordinated attack of the kind perpetrated in April 2019. Had one of the radical groups nevertheless attacked?

The question of who was behind the suicide attacks was answered soon after my scenario mind game. It indeed had been a splinter of the Thauweed Jamath, the National Thauweed Jamath (NTJ), which had coordinated, planned and conducted the attack. Later it was found that the local Sri Lankan group had sworn allegiance to the Islamic State (IS).<sup>12</sup> The group, however, has not consisted of trained foreign IS fighters, sent to Sri Lanka to perpetrate the attack. The members of the group were Sri Lankan Muslims, some from one wealthy middle-class family.<sup>13</sup> They were claimed to have adopted certain radical ideas and to thus have perpetrated violence.

### *The Puzzle of this Book*

The short perusal and mind game of potential perpetrators of the April 2019 attack in Sri Lanka had raised a question and linked to a puzzle, which emerged from the literature and public debate about incidents of this kind. While all of the four treated organisations and groups above have diverse ideological, cultural and religious backgrounds, they are united by the behaviour they apply: violence. While the literature on their emergence finds diverse reasons for each group to apply violence – either linked to their status in the society, to experiences of discrimination or to a

---

10 The SLTJ rejected such changes particularly because of the need to raise the minimum age for marriage of Muslim girls.

11 See the outlook given in 2017/2018 (Waha 2018:536).

12 United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2019).

13 BBC, 11 May 2019.

majority's minority complex<sup>14</sup> – they all are non-state actors who share the intentional use of physical force in order harm, damage, destroy or kill.<sup>15</sup> Looking beyond the borders of the island state and into the wider region of South Asia, one finds that even more non-state actors – individuals, groups and organisations – resorted to violence in the public sphere as form of behaviour. Even more, looking beyond South Asia, one finds that such forms of behaviour are present all over the world.<sup>16</sup> Diverse backgrounds of the perpetrators are recognised. Just looking at violent attacks in the public sphere in Germany, one finds a similar diversity of ideological backgrounds as in the tiny island state on the other side of the world. The violence against police and destruction of property in the course of the anti-G20 protests in Hamburg in July 2017 is attributed to left-wing extremism; the attack on a synagogue in Halle in October 2019 is attributed to right-wing extremism; the attack on a Sikh temple in Essen in April 2016 is attributed to 'homegrown' Islamism; the attack on the Christmas market in Berlin in December 2016 is attributed to the IS; the self-immolations of two Kurdish women in Mannheim in March 1994 are attributed to transnational Kurdish separatism.

Despite the variety of violent non-state actors all over the world frequently the public and at times academic discourse following a specific incident or attack concentrate on specific local explanations. But can a global phenomenon be only explained in local contexts? This appears to be counterintuitive and one has to wonder: Is there more that these diverse groups share than the behaviour? What are the similarities of violent perpetrators and their way towards violence? What can we learn and generalise from a comparison?

---

14 See, among others, Tambiah (1992) or Hoole (2001).

15 A basic definition of violence here is the following. Violence is defined as the use of physical force in order harm, damage, destroy or kill. See Waha (2018:73) for a discussion of the definition of violence.

16 For Southeast Asia see Croissant (2006), for South Asia see Gayer (2009), for Western Europe see Weinberg and Richard (2004), for left-wing terrorism see Kraushaar (2006), for a historical perspective see Laqueur and Hoffman (2016), for religious violence see Juergensmeyer (2017).

*Radicalisation and the Aim of this Book*

The question of why individuals and groups develop or join violent movements or implement violence<sup>17</sup> as preferred way of behaviour is not new. One of the most prominent and influential theories thereby is the Relative Deprivation Theory, prominently shaped by Gurr's *Why Men Rebel* (1970). Violence in the relative deprivation approach is regarded as the result of frustration, deriving from a difference between people's expectations of what they are rightfully *entitled* to and their *actual* conditions, particularly in comparison to others. This resulting frustration has to be released, e.g. in form of aggression against the group considered responsible for the frustration. In contrast to this theoretical approach stands the Rational Choice Theory. The rational choice approach argues that violence is a form of social behaviour. Social behaviour in turn is claimed the result of individual choices and decision making processes. "When they are faced with a situation that demands a choice, individuals weigh costs and benefits of each alternative and make a choice that, in their opinion, is the best for them, or, to use the jargon of rational choice theory, increases their expected utility" (Mitra 1999:29). In this understanding, violence is used as a means to an end in a situation where violence appears to be the best behaviour alternative to get what an agent wants.

With the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, the research on (political) violence and terrorism began to change. Silke (2004) has documented the changing trends of terrorism research, which had emerged since the 1970s and 1980s. The expansion of Islamist violence into the West, where perpetrators of violence were not fighters from far-away countries, but members of the Western societies, had put into focus the question of why individuals join violent campaigns and terrorist organisations.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the idea was promoted that indoctrination by terrorist organisations and social exclusion of migrants in Euro-

---

17 Differentiate the violence in the public and political realms from violence in the domestic sphere as well as from violence by non-state actors from violence by state agents, like police or military.

18 In the early terrorism research, already, a focus was put on the individual. Attempts were made to identify a terrorist profile with regard to mental conditions of individuals joining a terrorist cause. As Borum (2011:14) puts it, "Early efforts tended predominantly to focus on the individual level, assuming that the aberrant behavior so prominently associated with the dramatic consequences of terrorism must reflect some mental or personality abnormality. This line of thinking prompted some clinical explanations for terrorism and a multitude of attempts to identify a unique terrorist profile. Forty years of terrorism research, however, has

pean societies, leading to a search for identity, were making individuals vulnerable to mobilisation and were driving individuals into such violent behaviour (see e.g. Silber and Bhatt 2007).<sup>19</sup> While widely used and influential, this understanding, however, is problematic. Not only as it lacks the required empirical basis, but also as it considers “radicalization to be something *done to* a person. While this allows a policy response framed in terms of protection, it comes with two principal costs. The first is that we fail to understand or even explore the kinds of agency at work in experiences of radicalization” (McDonald 2018:10). The second is that it “isolates the person, imagining them as alone in front of a computer consuming radicalized messages, and removed from the social relationships and world they inhabit and shape. But [...] radicalization is a social process, full of exchanges, communications and shared emotions” (McDonald 2018:10-11).

Between the poles of Relative Deprivation Theory and Rational Choice Theory, which includes the poles of uncontrollable release of emotional stress and pressure and the cold blooded strategic use of violence for personal and/or political gains, many explanations in the academic literature, but also in the political discourse, can be sorted in. Thereby, the role of ideas, ideologies or religions is interpreted differently in the range of explanations. Despite the differences in approaches and explanations, many researchers can agree that violence does not come out of the nowhere or from one second to the other, but rather is the result of a development. Some scholars, for example, have used the concept of escalation (see Zartman 2008) to explain these developments. But particularly the concept of “radicalisation” has gained prominence in public discourses and policy recommending research.

There are manifold definitions of radicalisation, and for various reasons “radicalisation” as a concept is problematic. While most definitions may agree that radicalisation is a process (see Borum 2011), starting point and end point of this process are highly contested. Even more, even if one could agree that the process resulted – as the name ‘*radicalisation*’ suggests – in radicalism, the lacking agreement of what radicalism is, too, does not bring the required clarity.

It is not only ambiguous to what radicalism actually refers to – ideas, behaviour, ideas and behaviour – but also whether radicalism is approached

---

firmly debunked the notion that only ‘crazy’ people engage in terrorism and has yet to reveal a meaningful, stable, terrorist profile. Fortunately, with very few exceptions, most contemporary social scientists studying terrorism have moved past these early, naïve assumptions”.

19 See McDonald (2018) for a discussion.



analytically or normatively. A normative approach to radicalism comes with its own problems, not only for science but also for society. In liberal-democratic societies, as Gaspar et al. (2008) point out, non-violent radicalism can even be conducive. In their call for a shift from a normative towards an analytic approach to radicalisation, they define radicalisation as the “increasing questioning of the legitimacy of a normative order and/or the increasing readiness to fight the institutional structures of this order”, claiming that this definition of radicalisation allowed for the inclusion of all three understandings of radicalisation – ‘radicalisation into violence, radicalisation within violence, and radicalisation without violence’ (see Gaspar et al. 2018).

The puzzle of this book relates to the question of why and how violence emerges. As such, the book is less concerned with radicalisation without violence, but rather with radicalisation into violence. Much research – particularly the one intended to serve political purposes of prevention – has similarly focused on Radicalisation into Violent Extremism (RVE). As such, radicalisation often is conflated with the way into extremism and/or terrorism. Defining extremism and terrorism, in turn, comes with its own issues. “Extreme”, among others, is inherently relational, as it “refers to deviations from the norm” (Borum 2011:9). What extreme is, thus, varies with what the norm is. For a comparison of extreme phenomena, this relativity poses an issue – while in some societies it might be doomed extreme for a non-state actor to physically attack another person in public, in others violence in the public might be the norm. Similar issues have arisen in terrorism research. Analysing the field until the early 2000s, Silke already identified the issue of how to define terrorism and the subsequent question of appropriate research methods; and beyond that pointed towards the (also political) consequences of not defining terrorism, while continuing to work with it as a concept (Silke 2004:3ff.).

The question of how to define radicalisation as central research concept, thus, is not only a question of scientific quality. It has implications for the measures taken to prevent it. Despite the lack of a definition and despite further problems with operationalising radicalisation and subsequent issues with measuring radicalisation, radicalisation remains a term widely and prominently used – both in public discussions as well as policies and policy advises. Even worse, just like terrorism, radicalisation has been subject to political exploitation. As such, the discourse on non-state actors’ violence often becomes politicised, explanations thus narrowed to one factor and framed to serve the political needs of the ‘analysts’ and/or their funders.

To provide the basis for countering such narrowing and framing is the intention behind this publication. The aim of the book is, on the one hand, to show the variety of cases and phenomena, ranging from left to right, from secular to religious and from Asia to Europe; and on the other hand, to show the diversity of explanations and approaches – and the tensions between them – to insert a scientific input to public discourse which enables to break the often narrow, unidimensional focus.

The complexity of defining the concept of radicalisation does not reduce with the transcending of disciplinary boundaries as it is the case in this book. As the aim of this book is to provide insights into different explanations provided by scholars from various disciplines, the definition of the concept as basis for all chapters is not conducive for this endeavour. Thus, “radicalisation” in the title is the tag, the keyword to engage in the public discourse rather than the basic analytical concept. And yet, while approaches and explanations may vary, the dependent variable common to all contributions is *violence* and the explanandum the way towards non-state actors’ application of violence in the public sphere.

As such, while radicalisation here might be the roof under which the different scholars come together, the question underlying this book project is the question of why non-state agents resort to violence.

This ambitious aim may raise ambitious expectations. Therefore, it appears important to clearly state at the beginning, what the book will not do. This book is nothing but a first step towards broader and more systematic comparisons of cases, phenomena and regions. This book neither provides an *exhaustive* overview over phenomena and regions, nor a complete overview of theoretical, or methodological approaches, let alone of all disciplines’ treatment of the topic. It does not provide final solutions or explanations, nor a new theoretical framework. What it provides, however, is an empirical counterargument to simple explanations of why violence emerges – and as such the basis for informed political choice.

### *Structure of and Background to the Book*

The book at hand is the written documentation of an expert conference and subsequent workshop held by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung’s Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia in Singapore in January 2020. A group of most distinguished professors at different stages in their career have come together to present their work and to treat the puzzle raised above. They presented their research on diverse cases of violence in Asia and Europe, analysing it from different angles, perspectives and with the

methods of diverse disciplines, ranging from political science to sociology and anthropology.

The multiplicity of cases stood in the focus of the panel organisation as well as the approaches used by the scholars to explain them. Putting together scholars from different disciplines, perspectives and methodological approaches was supposed to create a tension as, more often than not, the positions presented challenged one another. The first part of the book captures these diverse approaches and explanatory tensions. During the conference, these tensions initiated highly productive discussions, which required every participant to defend the means and approaches of the own discipline as in such an interdisciplinary context there is little ‘common knowledge’ on which one can draw back on. While this interdisciplinary setting uncovered the issues of the ‘scientific babel’, the lack of a shared language, it has raised fruitful discussions and a more differentiated understanding of the issue at hand. The second part of the book seeks to present some of the results of the comparison of cases conducted in the workshop and the basis for policy recommendations drawn from it.

Following the structure of the event, in the first chapters, the different cases and diverse approaches explaining them will be given.

In the first chapter, the tension between emotion and rationality, structure and agency as well as individual and collective motivations for violence will be provided by the contributions of Kevin McDonald, Subrata K. Mitra and Aurel Croissant.

Kevin McDonald will provide insights into two phenomena, jihadist and far-right extremism in Europe, and analyses individuals’ experiences of radicalisation in his chapter “Jihadist and Far-Right Extremism: Subjectivity, Embodiment and Imaginaries of Violence”.

Subrata K. Mitra will discuss radical politics in democratic states, providing examples from India, in his chapter “Frenzied Crowds, Radical Politics and Consolidation of Democracy: The Indian Puzzle”.

Aurel Croissant will treat the interrelation between terrorism and democracy in Southeast Asia, analysing Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Myanmar, in his chapter “Radicalisation, Terrorism and Democratisation in Southeast Asia”.

In the second chapter, the tension between regional particulars and global and local interactions will be treated by the contributions of Rohan Gunaratna, D. Suba Chandran and Greg Barton.

Rohan Gunaratna will provide insights into the global threats posed IS, al Qaeda and Extreme Right Wing (XRW) and their contention in his chapter “Contention, Escalation and Cycles of Vengeance: Reflection on the Global Threat Landscape”.

Greg Barton will focus on transnational networks and local radicalisation in Indonesia and provide an outlook into the wider region in his chapter “The Historical Context and Regional Social Network Dynamics of Radicalisation and Recruitment of Islamic State Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Indonesia and its Southeast Asian Neighbours”.

D. Suba Chandran will give an overview over diverse ideological drivers of political violence, providing examples of left-wing violence and political violence against women in South Asia, in his chapter “Radicalisation in South Asia: Left, Right and Secular”.

In the third chapter, the complexity of links between the local and the global become apparent by the different approaches presented by Khuram Iqbal and Serina Abdul Rahman.

Khuram Iqbal will categorise the diverse streams, which fuel violence in Pakistan, in his chapter “Trends in Contemporary Terrorism in Pakistan”.

Finally, Serina Abdul Rahman will give profound insights into female agency in support for jihad in Malaysia in her chapter “Malaysian Women and Islamic Radicalisation in the Home”.

In the second part of the book, some of the results of the comparison of cases made during the workshop will be presented. Recommendations for political decision makers in tackling the issue at hand are discussed and the value of this endeavour – and its limitations – pointed out.

## *References*

- Asian Tribune. 2007. “Ugly Face of Wahabism in Sri Lanka Begins to Seep”. 01 September 2007.
- Asian Tribune. 2008. “Katankudy Sufi Muslims Prevented from Entering their Homes”. 22 February 2008.
- BBC. 2019. “Sri Lanka Attacks: The Family Networks behind the Bombings”. 11 May 2019. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48218907>). Accessed 20 February 2020.
- Borum, Randy. 2011. “Rethinking Radicalization”. *Journal of Strategic Security* 4 (4). Henley-Putnam University Press: 1–6.
- Burke, Adam and Mulakala, Anthea. 2011. “An insider’s view of donor support for the Sri Lankan peace process, 2000-2005”. In: Goodhand, J., ed. *Conflict and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka: caught in the peace trap?* London: Routledge.
- Chalk, Peter. 2008. “The Tigers Abroad: How the LTTE Diaspora Supports the Conflict in Sri Lanka”. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 9: 97-104.
- Colombo Telegraph. 2013. “The Wahhabi Invasion of Sri Lanka”. 27 March 2013. (<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/the-wahhabi-invasion-of-sri-lanka/>). Accessed 20 February 2020.

- Colombo Telegraph. 2013. "WikiLeaks: Muslim Militancy in Sri Lanka – Four Groups Based in Colombo – Former US Intelligence Officer". 03 April 2013.
- Croissant, Aurel, ed. 2006. *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia*. Bd. 4. Southeast Asian Modernities. Berlin: Lit-Verlag.
- Deegalle, Mahinda, ed. 2006. *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*. London [u.a.]: Routledge.
- Deegalle, Mahinda. 2004. "Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka". *Contemporary Buddhism* 5: 83-103.
- Gaspar, Hande Abay; Daase, Christopher; Deitelhoff, Nicole and Junk, Julian. 2018. "Was ist Radikalisierung? Präzisierung eines Umstrittenen Begriffs". *PRIF Report 5/2018*. Frankfurt am Main: HSFK. ([https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk\\_publicationen/prif0518.pdf](https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_publicationen/prif0518.pdf)). Accessed 20 February 2020.
- Gayer, Laurent, ed. 2009. *Armed Militias of South Asia: Fundamentalists, Maoists, and Separatists*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gunaratna, Rohan. 1994. *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: the Role of India's Intelligence Agencies*. Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research.
- Gunaratna, Rohan. 1995. *Sri Lanka, a Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP*. Kandy: Institute of Fundamental Studies.
- Gurr, Ted Robert. 1970. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hoole, Rajan. 2001. *Sri Lanka, the Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence & Murder: Commemoration Volume for Dr. Rajani Thiranagama*. Colombo: University Teachers for Human Rights Jaffna.
- Juergensmeyer, Mark. 2017. *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Kraushaar, Wolfgang, ed. 2006. *Die RAF und der Linke Terrorismus*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.
- Laqueur, Walter, und Hoffman, Bruce. 2016. *A History of Terrorism*. New Brunswick; London: Transaction Publishers.
- Matthews, Bruce. 2007. "Christian Evangelical Conversions and the Politics of Sri Lanka". *Pacific Affairs* 80: 455-72.
- McDonald, Kevin. 2018. *Radicalization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McGilvray, Dennis and Raheem, Mirak. 2011. "Origins of the Sri Lankan Muslims and Varieties of the Muslim Identity". In: Holt, J.C., ed. *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mitra, Subrata K. 1999. *Culture and Rationality: The Politics of Social Change in Post-colonial India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Moore, Mick. 1993. "Thoroughly Modern Revolutionaries: The JVP in Sri Lanka". *Modern Asian Studies* 27: 593-642.
- Pape, Robert A. 2006. *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.
- Samaranāyaka, Gāmaṇi. 2008. *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1971 – 1987*. New Delhi: Gyan Publ. House.

- Silber, M. and Bhatt, A. 2007. *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*. New York: New York Police Department.
- Silke, Andrew, ed. 2004. *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures*. London: Frank Cass.
- Swamy, Narayan M. R. 2003. *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran; the First Profile of the World's Most Ruthless Guerrilla Leader*. Delhi: Konark Publishers.
- Swamy, Narayan M. R. 2010. *The Tiger Vanquished: LTTE's Story*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja. 1992. *Buddhism Betrayed*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.
- The Daily Mirror. 2019. "BBS to be dissolved after general elections: Gnanasara Thera". 20 November 2019 ([http://www.dailymirror.lk/front\\_page/BBS-to-be-dissolved-after-general-elections-Gnanasara-Thera/238-178139](http://www.dailymirror.lk/front_page/BBS-to-be-dissolved-after-general-elections-Gnanasara-Thera/238-178139)). Accessed 20 February 2020.
- The Island. 2001. "A Concept of Liberation in Change and Transition". 23 November 2001. (<http://www.island.lk/2001/11/23/featur02.html>). Accessed 21 February 2020.
- Time. 2013. "The Face of Buddhist Terror". 01 July 2013.
- United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. 2019. "Sri Lanka 2019 Human Rights Report". *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019*. (<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SRI-LANKA-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>). Accessed 21 February 2020.
- Waha, La Toya. 2018. *Religion and State-Formation in Transitional Societies: Sri Lanka in a Comparative Perspective*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Weinberg, Leonard and Richard, Louise. 2004. "Conflict Theory and the Trajectory of Terrorist Campaigns in Western Europe". In: Silke, Andrew. *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures*. Cass series on political violence. London: Frank Cass.
- Wickramasinghe, Nira. 2014. *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age – A History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zartman, William. 2008. *Negotiation and Conflict Management: Essays on Theory and Practice*. Oxon: Routledge.

# Chapter I

## Between the Political and the Particular





# Jihadist and Far-Right Extremism: Subjectivity, Embodiment and Imaginaries of Violence

Kevin McDonald

## *Radicalisation: A Contested Concept*

Over the past 15 years a new kind of violence has emerged in the democratic societies of Europe, North America and the Pacific, from attacks on the transport systems in London and Madrid in 2005, to other forms of extreme violence including the killing of over 180 people by a jihadist commando group in Paris in November 2015. During the period 2011 to 2017 some 5,000 Europeans travelled to Syria to join jihadist groups. While travel to Syria to join jihadist groups experienced a dramatic reduction following the military defeats experienced by the Islamic State and the loss of its capital, Raqqa, in October 2017, radicalised violence has nonetheless continued in Europe. In the final three months of 2019 four police officers were murdered by a colleague at Police Headquarters in Paris (Vincent and Cahpuis 2019); two passers-by were murdered during an attempted massacre at a Synagogue in Halle in Germany (Koehler 2019); and two participants were killed while attending a prison education event in London (Guardian staff, 2019). In Paris and London, the killers were supporters of jihadist violence, while in Halle the suspected killer live-streamed the attack to an online gaming platform, claiming it as an action in defence of the white race (Koehler 2019).

It was during the past 15 years that the concept of ‘radicalisation’ emerged in its current form, becoming increasingly widespread following the publication of *Radicalization in the West: the Homegrown Threat* by the New York Police Department in 2007 (Bhatt and Silber 2007). This was an attempt to understand what was seen to be a break with organised terrorism that had been present in Europe and North America during the 1970s and into the 1980s. The violence that emerged from the mid-2000s was often improvised, undertaken by friends, by family-based networks, or by individuals. This was very different from the groups that emerged out of the collapsing student movement in the 1970s: the Weather Underground in the United States, the Red Brigades in Italy, the Red Army Faction in Germany, and the Japanese Red Army (for an overview of these groups see Mc-

Donald 2013). These militarised groups that emerged as the radical student movement collapsed were understood as expressions of ‘clandestine political violence’ (Della Porta 2013), the product of a mutation of a social movement or conflict. A key to the analysis of these groups was a process of ‘competitive escalation’ (Della Porta 2013), where increasingly violent demonstrations were met by, or a response to, increasingly violent policing, with activist groups coming to understand themselves as ‘at war’ with the state, in particular the police, and modelling themselves as ‘urban guerrillas’ inspired by romantic images of Cuban or Palestinian fighters. Almost all the members of the groups that emerged in the 1970s were former student activists, who, frustrated at what they believed to be the impossibility of radical social change, gradually came to embrace clandestinity and political violence. This was not the case with the jihadist violence that became increasingly evident in Europe from the mid-2000s, where those involved had little or no previous experience of activism.

In its first iteration, ‘radicalisation’ as an explanatory paradigm was an expression of strain theory, where young second generation immigrants find themselves caught ‘in between’ the world of their parents that is no longer intelligible, and a new society they experience as exclusionary or stigmatising. Not surprisingly, this approach to radicalisation was first formulated in the United States, drawing on North American approaches to migration, social integration and theories of the rise of gangs. Young people according to this approach were in experiences of uncertain transition, and it was the failure of European society to achieve the integration of second-generation migrants that was seen as the ultimate cause of radicalisation – something that emerged where social identity was in crisis, leading to an increasingly religious search for self (Bhatt and Silber 2007). It is important to note that this understanding of generation and integration was framed by a broader cultural context shaped by theories of ‘clash of civilizations’, particularly influential in the period following the collapse of the Berlin Wall (Huntington 1996). In its initial formulation, radicalisation was conceived as a linear process, leading from vulnerability, through indoctrination, to ‘jihadization’ and then ‘attack’. Thus framed, radicalisation was understood as a process where failure of social integration exacerbated religious identity-seeking to the point where this became violent.

Understood in this way, the term ‘radicalisation’ has been hotly contested. While it frames major public policy initiatives such as the European Radicalisation Awareness Network or national programmes such as Prevent in the United Kingdom, its critics argue that this framework has embedded within it an opposition between ‘old terrorism’ intelligible in political terms and a ‘new terrorism’ with its origins in Islamist theology.

Critics argue that the use of ‘radicalisation’ as a framework has led to the creation of ‘suspect communities’ and to a failure to understand the political origins of the conflicts and fault lines generating contemporary violence (Kundnani 2012). From this perspective, radicalisation is understood as a dimension of what is claimed to be a ‘global rise of religious violence’ (Juergensmeyer 2017). Largely located within disciplines which had previous engagement with terrorism, in particular International Relations and Security Studies, this conceptualisation drew on previous models of ‘propaganda’ that had emerged during the Cold War, reframing this within a paradigm of ‘narrative’ and calling for ‘counter narrative’ as a response. This appeared to capture the importance of images, videos and digital media in the jihadist radicalisation of young people that became increasingly evident with the first departures to Syria in 2011. Just as radicalisation was seen to be something done to a person, this model of communication was understood as a one-way transmission of messages, directed in particular to those vulnerable to recruitment.

There are several problems with this understanding of ‘radicalisation’. Firstly, it unifies experiences and pathways that are very different, from the high performing school student to the drug dealer, while separating ‘radicalised’ violence from other violence that arguably demonstrates significant similarities, such as that of school shooters or its recent development as incel-violence<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, while highlighting the importance of digital communication, early approaches to radicalisation understood such communication as indoctrination or recruitment, drawing on earlier understandings of propaganda as a system of one-way communication. While alert to the importance of communication, there was initially little understanding of the ‘social’ and ‘affective’ nature of digital communication when compared to older models of ‘indoctrination’. Thirdly, while the emphasis on vulnerability and strain allowed scope for policies based on prevention and safeguarding, it offered little insight into the forms of *agency* involved in radicalisation, and as a result, little insight into the kinds of agency involved in experiences of disengagement. Within this paradigm, radicalisation came to be understood as something *done to* a vulnerable young person, while equally, deradicalisation is something *done to* a young person.

---

1 ‘Incels’ are men who consider themselves to be rejected by women, and thus ‘involuntary celibates’. The first incel massacre, aimed at female students of the University of California, Santa Barbara, took place in May 2014. For an overview see Beauchamp 2019.

This chapter presents research that sets out to understand radicalisation as agency and experience, and in the process begins to consider what we can learn from a comparative exploration of radicalisation in Europe and Asia. The first part of the chapter is based on interviews and focus groups with 50 members of jihad supporting groups in the United Kingdom together with an analysis of the social media posts of 30 young people who travelled to Syria to join jihadist groups between 2013 and 2017 (this is detailed in McDonald 2018). The second part introduces research on experiences of far-right extremism currently emerging in Europe, linking these to broader networks in particular associated with online digital forums based in North America. From these cases, several themes are highlighted in terms of comparison between the European experience and that of Asia.

### *Jihadist Radicalisation*

Recent research has underlined the extent to which radicalisation is a social process. What sort of social worlds does this take place in, and how can we approach radicalisation as *embodied*, *imaginary* and *relational*? The early approaches to radicalisation and violence were largely framed within a binary of radicalised or not radicalised, violent or not violent. However my research suggests that we can distinguish between very different kinds of radicalisation, each framing different imaginaries and practices of violence. While aspects overlap, we can distinguish three different ‘experiences’ or ‘pathways’ of radicalisation. The first of these centres on ‘us’, and is constructed around the axes of us/them, inclusion/exclusion, order/disorder, or purity/impurity. Across these we encounter *affective states* organised around anxiety and the social construction of disgust, as well as the search for security in a structured and closed community. A second experience of radicalisation centres on ‘you’, and is built around an affirmation of power, with significant debt to imaginaries of gaming and to an experiential structure of the hidden and the revealed, the visible and invisible, winners and losers. A third focuses on experiences of ‘I’, where we encounter practices of individuation such as purification of the self, sacrifice of the self, and experiences of the sublime where a heightened sense of awe and enormity gives rise to experiences of displacement, in some cases developing into experiences of the uncanny, danger or dread. This third field is often experienced by the actors involved in religious terms.

*Us: Communitarian Radicalisation*

The first pathway identified is shared across a number of quite different experiences. One expression of communitarian radicalisation possesses the same building blocks as racism, centred on socially constructed ‘disgust’, and manifests the experiential structure of racism and hate crime. Here the imaginary of violence is one of *cleansing*, one we see starkly evident in the experience of people such as Aqsa Mahmood, a young woman who left Glasgow to travel to Syria in 2013. She lived her life on social media, this was a space both intimate and public, one that she shared with her ‘fam’. In 2012 she encountered distant suffering, in this case the Israeli incursion into Gaza, and her social media timeline, once full of interchanges with her friends, begins to be populated by images of suffering and violence. Over a period of several months we see a clear transformation occur, evident in the way she experiences the world: first in terms of good and bad, then innocent and guilty, then in terms of the pure and the impure. At this latter point, the ‘other’, in this case Shia Muslims, become experienced as unclean, grotesque and ultimately a source of contamination. As she radicalises, much of her social media is taken up by communications setting out to establish how Shia Muslims are ‘disgusting’, an affective process that establishes a truth: ‘you make me sick, therefore you are sickening’ (Ahmed 2007). This is the anthropological structure of racism and hate crime, evident in the search for purity, a search that radicalises anxiety about disorder, experienced as dirt and the risk of contamination (Douglas, 1966). This fear of contamination is visceral, in that it does not work fundamentally at the level of ideas or cognitive propositions. While still a student, Mahmood tweets constantly about the impurity of Shia Muslims, focusing on ruptures of borders and barriers that ensure ontological and biological integrity. Her tweets are populated with claims that Shia Muslims have sex with animals, or that the Shia religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini approved sex with children. Her tweets, combining humour with graphic and disturbing images, suggest a kind of horror mixed with fascination, one where attraction and repulsion mix. It is the horror and disgust she constructs with others through the circulation of images, memes and jokes that allows Mahmood to embrace an imaginary of violence which she experiences in terms of purification or cleansing. So, while still at university in Scotland, she is retweeting calls for genocide (McDonald 2018).

Communitarian radicalisation also emerges among those who seek to disengage from criminal pathways that are experienced as fundamentally self-destructive. In a world of disorder and chaos, radicalisation involves a

process of socialisation into a protective group which offers certainty and order. This mirrors the process where people join gangs (McDonald 1999) and is particularly evident in the experiential pathway of radicalisation in prison (Khosrokhavar 2013). In such cases, such as ‘Jamal’ who radicalised in prison and joined al-Mouhajiroun (McDonald 2018), the threat of violence is not only external, but internal – his own violence is dangerous and unpredictable. For him, radicalisation involves the passage into a group that offers structure and certainty, not only from the danger presented by others, but by his own potential for uncontrollable violence. In his case, just as joining a gang, radicalisation is fundamentally a passage from disorder to order. From this perspective, violence is a strategy to impose *order* in a world of *disorder*.

A different expression of communitarian radicalisation is evident among adolescent girls who radicalise as a group, as we see with a group of schoolgirls who travelled to Syria from London in February 2015. These girls live their lives on social media, where we encounter themes of vulnerability, beauty, truth and sisterhood. They live in a world of adolescent fusion, a way they are managing the passage from childhood to adulthood.

This way of managing this transition is different from that of gang membership. The gang is a means to impose order on disorder, a response to exclusion often experienced in school or neighbourhood. While many gangs become involved in criminality, involvement in criminality is often a means to be valued or included in a protective social group – evident in the role of violence in initiation rituals, a rite of passage that demonstrates loyalty to the group and its leaders (McDonald 1999).

The experience of these girls is equally one of transition from childhood to adulthood. However, there are few signs that they are excluded from school or neighbourhood, factors typically associated with the transition into a counter-world of the gang. Instead, the profile of these girls is one of ‘good student’. Just as Mahmood, they are aware of distant suffering, and they too live their lives through social media. But they are younger than Mahmood, and their world is one where they share their love for each other as ‘sisters’. However, they are leaving childhood, and with this comes the potential for relationships with boys, bringing with it jealousy that could fracture the love of the group for each other. However it is possible for the group to share one love, in this case the love of a powerful divine Other, a kind of fusional adolescent religious experience (Guitton 2015). This love will not shatter the sisterhood, on the contrary, it reinforces it. This helps us understand how these girls could travel to Syria, knowing that they will marry within weeks of arriving, and that the person they will marry is someone they don’t know. It is precisely because they *do not know*

their future husband that they can imagine marrying him: he is not an individual, he is a cypher, an expression of the God who is made real through the power of the Calif. This is not a love relationship that individuates. It is a love relationship that is not only consistent with the sisterhood, it takes the sisterhood to the next level. In this adventure of hijra they are embarking upon, the sisters can share everything, even their husband. In the words of another young woman who travelled to Syria, '*Being co wives with ur bestfriend is beautiful*' (@GreenBirds22, Twitter 9 July 2014).

Not all girls follow this radicalisation pathway, but it is associated with a fusion experience typical of the strategies young people use to navigate from the safety of the family to the uncertainty of a wider social world. In this case, radicalisation is framed in terms of sisters sharing everything, even a husband. Hence the fundamental importance of travelling as a group, and an imaginary that cannot extend beyond this. One of the girls was interviewed by a British newspaper in 2019 after the fall of the Islamic State. Reflecting on the war in Syria and the possibility of death, she states 'I always thought if we did get killed, we would get killed together' (Loyd, 2019). The sisters would also share death.

## *You*

A very different pathway emerges among gamers, hackers and among groups involved in criminality. In these cases, radicalisation is fundamentally experienced in terms of increased power, while violence is an act which *reveals a truth* about the victim.

Before he travelled to Syria, Junaid Hussain, the principal creator of the IS Cyber Caliphate, was convicted for hacking into the email of a staff officer of the then UK Prime Minister, as well as hacking a UK terrorist help line. Hussain had originally been involved in the 'Mujahideen Hacking Unit', a group involved in attacking Hindu nationalist sites in India. From there he extended to attacking poorly defended websites in order to post conspiracy theory messages, largely asserting that the United States was responsible for the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon.<sup>2</sup> As leader of the hacker group TeaMp0isoN, Hussain defaced hundreds of websites, leaving messages celebrating his power, mastery and destiny, using the name 'TriCk' (McDonald 2018). In these actions, the fundamental affect involved is shared humour – Hussain celebrates his

---

2 See, for example (<http://www.zone-h.com/mirror/id/126846110>).



skill and epic destiny as a hacker, while also revealing the weakness of his victim. When Hussain explained his path to hacking, well before his decision to travel to Syria and create the Cyber Caliphate, he describes discovering a world of hidden power, his discovery that the world is governed by secret forces, in particular the Illuminati, the Freemasons, and the Committee of 300 (McDonald 2018). His radicalisation alerts us to the pervasive presence of conspiracy theory among jihadists, embedded in an experiential structure of the hidden and the revealed. The person who has discovered such conspiracies is energised and transformed: they believe they have the courage to look at the world directly, they are not afraid to take the *red pill* (to evoke the language of contemporary neo-Nazis who describe their discovery of hidden Jewish plots to control the world as being ‘red pillled’) (Evans 2018). In a world shaped by conspiracies, the powerful are always hidden, and hence while Hussain’s image was all over social media, he was always masked – the mask not being a means to hide his identity, but a technology of transformation. Masking allows Hussain to become someone else, defined by his power. Living in a world of conspiracy is to live in an affective state where hidden meaning is just out sight around the corner, of breathless excitement and of the certainty of one’s own superiority to those who either are not smart enough to see the conspiracy, or lack the courage to look at the world as it is.

In the radicalisation of Junaid Hussain we encounter an experiential structure of power and pleasure that is also fundamental to criminal pathways that combine personal redemption with the sacralisation of war against society (Roy 2017). From this perspective, violence does not simply seek to kill, it seeks to humiliate, in order to reveal a truth about the victim. Hence the importance of *communicating* such violence, and involving others in this, even at distance. In such cases, the action mirrors that of the bully – their violence is public, and they seek to turn their audience into protagonists through humiliating the victim in a way that will get their audience to laugh. This underlines the fundamental dimension of humour in the communication associated with such violence – laughing together being a fundamental social activity. And here too we encounter the fundamental importance of humour in far-right extremism, built around laughter at the suffering and humiliation of the other, and the celebration of the power of the observer. The extensive role of humour and parody in violent extreme right networks, underlines the celebration of the power not to be affected by the suffering of the other (Greene 2019). Here we encounter a range of experiences all associated with a paradigm of ‘gamification’ (McDonald 2018), where radicalisation is lived through relationships of winning and losing, while violence is experienced as fundamentally revealing



a truth about its victim – hence the importance of videoing and uploading images of the humiliation of the victim, laughing and taking pleasure in the suffering of the other.

In such cases, violence equally reveals a truth about the perpetrator – hence the importance of filming the self, narcissism and a culture of fame. This was particularly evident in the case of Abdulhamid Aboud, the leader of the November 2015 attacks in Paris, who during his time in Syria wore a GoPro camera attached to his hat, and would upload images to his Twitter account each day to celebrate his exploits (McDonald 2018).

*I*

A quite different experience of radicalisation centres on experiences of selfhood. In this pathway, what counts is the ‘I’. Here we encounter experiences all based around the idea of rupture with one’s past, where violence is an imaginary that both destroys one’s past and reveals a truth about oneself.

Such violence, as in the other examples we are discussing, is not limited to experience of radicalisation. The paradigm case is the school shooter, who seeks to fracture reality through the scale of violence. Here an imaginary of scale is fundamental – the violence is to be ‘epic’, so great that it will fracture reality itself, and in the process reveal the greatness of the protagonist. This violence is intoxicating, one where the protagonist can declare ‘I am a god’, a truth that will be revealed through the enormity of the killings they will undertake. This imaginary of greatness is not only associated with school shooters. It is evident in the narcissism of conspiracy theory (where once again only the most intelligent and most courageous can see truth).

The ‘I’ also emerges as central to a range of experiences shaped by themes of vastness and enormity. These were at the centre of the History of Humanity videos produced by Omar Diaby that proved so important in among the first wave of French people to travel to Syria, being extensively downloaded and discussed on jihadist websites (Thomson 2018). The constant theme in these breathless discussions is the vastness of the conspiracy that is behind world government, a conspiracy shaped by dark supernatural powers (jinn and the promise of the antichrist, the dajall). While based on extraordinary secrets, this world, as in all conspiracy theories, is made up of the day-to-day events that are fundamentally *familiar*. Diaby’s videos, framed with threatening soundtracks and ominous colour palettes combined with blurred and distorted extracts from the television news, com-

municate a world that is familiar, but at the same time fundamentally strange. To draw on Freud, this is the ‘uncanny’ – the familiar turned weird and threatening (Freud 1919/2003). All these experiences give rise to an affective state of fear and anxiety, a world in disorder and chaos, associated with an aesthetic experience more than a desire to construct a community of order. This same theme of vastness and insignificance, close to the Romantic experience of the sublime, recurs throughout jihadi culture.

We encounter another experience of ‘I’ in experiences of radicalisation. This is where death is not a means to cleanse the world through killing the other, as with Mahmood, but is a means to purify the self (Khosrokhavar 2014). In such cases, death not only obliterates the self, but the life one has led. We see this in Brahim Abdeslam’s suicide bombing at the Comptoir Voltaire in Paris in the November 2015 attack, where he sets out to kill himself and the patrons in a bar. He does not run in shouting and threatening, seeking to instil fear in terror in those he will kill. As he quietly walks into the bar, no one even looks at him. He pauses, places his hands over his face, takes several breaths, and then detonates his suicide belt<sup>3</sup>. Only a month earlier he had been the manager of a bar in Brussels that had been closed by police on the ground that it was being used as a base to distribute drugs (McDonald 2018). This violence does not attempt to humiliate or terrify its victims. Abdeslam is not seeking to reveal their unworthiness through humiliating them. His violence is focused on the self.

### *Far-Right Radicalisation*

The analytical categories that emerge in the analysis of jihadist radicalisation offer insight into the far-right radicalisation emerging in Europe, North America and the industrialised nations of the Pacific. Fundamentally different from the neo-Nazi street fighters of the 1980s, this radicalisation is framed by affects and imaginaries that have their origins in digitally mediated worlds.

The idea of livestreaming mass killing was first associated with European jihadists in Syria. But it also emerged at the same time on the image board 4Chan, where in 2014 a man uploaded images of his girlfriend who

---

3 The attack was filmed by the café security camera. Extracts from this film are widely available online, for example at (<https://video-streaming.orange.fr/tv/inedit-m6-diffuse-l-explosion-de-brahim-abdeslam-au-comptoir-voltaire-CNT000001a3R-JM.html>).

he had just strangled, commenting that this was much more difficult than in the movies (Nagle 2017: 27). In the case of 4Chan, such examples of streaming murder were first associated with groups describing themselves as ‘robots’, and later ‘incels’ (involuntarily celibates). Opposed to both feminism and non-whites, this imaginary of violence comes to be embraced by contemporary expressions of neo-Nazism, as a cohort left 4Chan to move to 8Chan. This is fundamental to understand two far-right killings that took place in 2019: the March 2019 mass killing of people praying in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and the October 2019 attempted mass killing of people praying at a synagogue in Halle, Germany.

Both these attacks owe a significant debt to imaginaries of violence constructed by school shooters, which became increasingly visible on 4chan with the introduction of its /r/ (relationships) board, a board that came to be populated by the group we now call Incels. In October 2015 Chris Harper Mercer announced on 4Chan’s /r/ board that he was going to undertake a mass killing at a school on the next day (Nagle 2017: 26). Ideas about how to proceed were shared, with Harper Mercer at one point asking those in the discussion to ‘keep me in your prayers’. Throughout the discussion he receives advice and support, one participant welcoming his declaration as the beginning of the ‘beta uprising’ (here ‘beta’ refers to ‘beta males’ who are not able to gain the affection of women). In the ‘manifesto’ that Harper Mercer distributed to his victims before killing them, he declares that he dies a virgin, evokes the Columbine killers, but he also evokes Satan as the source of his action, promising to return to life after his death as a vampire. He has previously explored the ‘lost secrets of the Illuminati’. Similar references to Satanism and other expressions of the occult recur in the imaginary of neo-Nazi groups such as System Resistance Network in the United Kingdom, evoking the place of the occult in the Nazism during the fascist era (Staudenmaier 2014).

What is striking is the extent of themes that are shared by jihadist and far-right violence: racial disgust framed within an imaginary of purity and impurity; a desire for death of the self within a desire to fracture the real through the scale of violence; the vertigo of power associated with the discovery of hidden conspiracies and knowledge; fascination with the sublime, expressed in terms of attraction and repulsion. Humour plays a similar and fundamental communicative role in both jihadist and far-right extremism. Historically these themes have played an important role in far-left violent extremism as well. The leaders of the American Weather Underground were fascinated by the violence of Charles Manson’s murderous cult (Varon 2004), while conspiracy theories around Jewish financial power retain a significant place in the imaginary of the far-left (Byford 2011).

*My Name is Anon*

On October 9, 2019, the day of Yom Kippur, a 29-year old man attempted to attack a Jewish synagogue in the city of Halle, Germany, live streaming the attack from a camera he was wearing. Equipped with poorly constructed home-made explosives and weapons, he was unable to gain entry to the synagogue, and proceeded instead to kill two people he encountered – the first a woman who was walking past him in the street and admonished him for the disturbance he was making, the second victim was a patron in a kebab shop. He streamed the video of the attack from a camera he was wearing to a gaming platform. Immediately before attempting to enter the synagogue, the alleged killer directed his camera towards himself, and speaks to it:

‘Hi, my name is Anon. I think the Holocaust never happened. Feminism is the cause of the decline of the West which acts as a scapegoat for mass immigration. And the root of all these problems is the Jew. Would you like to be friends?’ (archived video).

This brief statement captures critical dimensions of an experience of radicalisation. The attacker is speaking in English: he is not an ultranationalist, he is not defending a national identity. Something else happening.

The attacker begins by declaring ‘*My name is Anon*’. The term ‘Anon’ refers to 4Chan and 8Chan. These are both anonymous discussion boards, where the website attributes ‘Anon’ as the ‘name’ or ‘handle’ to every person who posts to the site. Describing himself as ‘Anon’ signals that he is part of an online world, and that he is sharing his attack with that world. He posts livestream of the attack to an online gaming platform. He begins by an act of Holocaust denial, thus affirming his links with neo-Nazism. But why does he state that feminism is the source of what he sees as the decline of the West, and the cause of mass migration? This is because he believes that as a result of feminism, women refuse to have sex with men like him, and the resulting population decline is the source of mass immigration – leading, he believes, to the replacement of the white race. But how is it possible that the Jewish people are at the source of this decline? Because he believes that feminism is the product of Jewish intellectuals. This reflects a widespread campaign on alt-right social media that ‘Feminism is a Jewish war on women’, a theme widely repeated on neo-fascist online platforms.

The attacker also posted a manifesto online, where he refers to conspiracy tropes of ZOG – Zionist Occupied Government – and gamer culture, completing his manifesto with a ‘jej’, used in place of LOL. Throughout

his manifesto his style of humour is self-deprecating, he is not presenting himself as a god wreaking vengeance.

While the attacker does not refer to his action as ‘we’, it was received and welcomed in those terms on 4Chan’s /pol/ board. One poster writes:

*‘WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS  
WE HAVE THE POWER TO KILL I.R.L.  
WE ARE THE M.K. ULTRA NOW!  
They will never laugh at us again, boys. We can wear our fedoras again,  
with pride!  
Praise KEK!’ (4Chan/pol/, 10 October 2019)<sup>4</sup>*

The reference to ‘never laugh at us again’ and ‘fedoras’ evokes dimensions of Incel culture, being laughed at by others or wearing unfashionable fedora hats. The Halle attack is celebrated on 4Chan as reversing this stigma, an act through which ‘we’ are making progress, ‘we’ have the power to kill in real life, indeed ‘we’ are so powerful that we can be compared with what members of 4Chan believe to be the secret FBI mind control programme, M.K. Ultra. This poster also refers to ‘KEK’. Originally a gamer expression for LOL emerging in *World of Warcraft*, in December 2017 KEK was transformed on 4Chan’s /h/ or ‘history’ board into a mythical god, represented by Pepe the Frog, a figure that had become claimed by alt-right groups as their own. Not long after the creation of the god KEK, other participants in 4Chan created a country that the god KEK rules, calling it Kekistan, and imagining it inhabited by Kekistanis. Then on 4Chan a movement for the liberation of this fictional country developed. Over the following 12 months Kekistan became a central motif of a cluster of videos extending and developing principally on YouTube, rapidly expanding in scope, in part responding to the algorithm that builds links between themes across the platform. This has provided the basis for the expansion of Kekistan as an imaginary, a parody of liberation struggles, associated with the call to ‘kill all normies’ (Nagel 2017). The production and circulation of YouTube videos was central to this process, driven by what Emeline de Keulenaar describes as ‘the ironic, trolling, countercultural online right’ (2019: 2). Here we encounter a political project constructed in the language of irony and parody. While KEK emerged in a process of playing with mashup culture, and was not originally associated with Nazism, the link has now been forged, in particular through the creation of the flag of Kekistan, modelled

---

4 This conversation is archived at (<https://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/229357532/#q229360881>).

on the warflag of Nazi Germany. This flag appeared at the Unite the Right demonstration in the United States, and also at pro-Bolsonaro rallies in Brazil.

An important current in the alt-right emerges from the world of gamers, with significant debts to the anti-feminist mobilisation referred to as 'gamergate' (Bezio 2018). Originating as a campaign against a victim of revenge porn, gamergate mobilised an opposition to political correctness, explicitly framing this as anti-feminist. This converged with Incel culture on shared digital platforms, where Incel appeals to violence against women often draw upon an imaginary of opposition to black men, presented as desired by women. It is the opposition to both women and non-whites that has been the basis for the convergence between Incels and white supremacism evident in the attempted massacre in Halle in October 2019.

Conspiracy theories play a role throughout these different pathways. There is a convergence with the experience of gaming, where the world is experienced in terms of multiple levels and hidden meanings. It was this convergence that allowed Junaid Hussain to move so easily from the world of gaming and involvement in Anonymous to the world of the jihad, evident in the way the Cyber Caliphate he created drew on the imaginary of Anonymous and its practice of 'doxing', a practice that involves posting private information to online sites (see McDonald 2015). Hussain's Islamic State Cyber Caliphate hacked into low security department store websites in the United States to identify the private addresses and phone numbers of US service personnel. It then posted this information online, calling on ISIS supporters in the US to go to these addresses and kill the occupants. These online posts were accompanied by the celebratory claim '*we know everything about you*'. In Hussain's world, the powerful are invisible, while the powerless are exposed. The passage from a world devoted to secret meanings is also evident in the experience of Sally Jones who travelled with Hussain to Syria, who before embracing jihadism was a practitioner of alternative art and witchcraft (McDonald 2018), where the access to secret knowledge is a path to pleasure and power.

### *Conclusion: Experiences of Radicalisation*

The radicalisation pathways we have explored in this chapter are not the result of manipulation or recruitment, but nor are they a reflection of archaic religious beliefs or the action of religious zealots. A great deal is shared between jihadist radicalisation and the alt-right that has become increasingly visible in Europe and North-America over the past decade. Just

as the alt-right in Europe and North America evokes fears of collective disappearance in its narrative of ‘great replacement’ focusing on migration, so too imaginaries of death appear increasingly evident in communal tensions in Asia, most recently in Sri Lanka with rumours of sterilisation creams being applied to women’s underwear by Muslim shopkeepers, claimed to be a means for Muslims to replace the Sinhalese population (Amarasingam 2019). The occult plays an important role in contemporary jihadism, mirroring the place of Satanism in Nazi subcultures in both North American and Europe. Similar themes of secret knowledge, vast conspiracies, immense danger and the promise of great power, all play an important role in the affective world sustaining the growth of jihadism in Asia, clearly evident in Indonesia (Fealy 2019).

Shifting our focus to a much closer engagement with actual experiences of radicalisation allows us to see clearly a new paradigm of violence emerging, one that is very different from the ‘clandestine political violence’ of the 1970s. What is very clear is the extent to which jihadist and alt-right extremism demonstrate similar practices and cultures: the importance of masking, an experiential structure built around the opposition between the hidden and the revealed; the experience of empowerment associated with the discovery of hidden knowledge. A closer engagement with experiences of radicalisation also highlights very different practices and imaginaries of violence. Here we encounter violence as *cleansing*, mirroring the same experiential structure as racism and hate crime; violence as *revealing a truth* about the protagonist and/or the victim; and lastly, violence as *fracturing reality* (search for scale of killing, obliteration of self and other). From this perspective, radicalisation is not an experience of manipulation or recruitment, nor is it an expression of religious rejection of the world. Rather it is a form of practice or agency best understood as *world-building*. As such, radicalisation needs to be understood as an inherently political endeavour<sup>5</sup>, a form of political action best understood as a project of ‘anti-democracy’, or what Rosanvallon (2008) describes as politics in an age of distrust. The closer we get to actual experiences of radicalisation the more clearly we see the extent to which this involves *embodied, communicative subjectivity*, where actors produce and are sustained by an ‘affective fabric’ that is increasingly evident in digital sociality: practices of humour, exploit, fear, parody and irony, racism, celebrity, fascination with the occult, a contemporary dread of insignificance. It only through engaging with and

---

5 I would like to thank our editor, Dr. La Toya Waha, for underlining this dimension of radicalisation in her response to an earlier draft of this chapter.

understanding such practices that we can hope to understand, and build responses to, the contemporary allure of radicalisation.

## References

- Ahmed, S. 2007. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London: Routledge
- Amarasingam, A. 2019. "Terrorism in the Teardrop Island: Understanding the Easter 2019 Attacks in Sri Lanka", *CTC Sentinel*, 12 (5): 1-10.
- Beauchamp, Z. 2018. "Incel, the Misogynist Ideology that Inspired the Deadly Toronto Attack Explained". *Vox*, 25 April 2018.
- Bezio, K. 2018. "Ctrl-Alt-Del: GamerGate as a Precursor to the Rise of the Alt-Right". *Leadership*, 14 (5): 556-566.
- Byford, J. 2011. *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Keulenaar, E. 2019. *The Rise and Fall of Kekistan: A Story of Idiomatic Animus as Told Through YouTube's Related Videos*. (<https://oilab.eu/the-rise-and-fall-of-kekistan-a-story-of-idiomatic-animus-as-told-through-the-youtube-recommender-system/>).
- Della Porta, D. 2013. *Clandestine Political Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Douglas, M. 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Evans, R. 2018. "From Memes to Infowars: How 75 Fascist Activists Were Red-Pilled". *Bellingcat*, 11 October. (<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/americas/2018/10/11/memes-infowars-75-fascist-activists-red-pilled/>).
- Fealy, G. 2019. "Apocalyptic Thought, Conspiracism and Jihad in Indonesia". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 41, 1, 63-85.
- Freud, S. 2003 [1919]. *The Uncanny*. London: Penguin.
- Greene, V. 2019. "Deplorable Satire: Alt-Right Memes, White Genocide Tweets, and Redpilling Normies". *Studies in American Humour*, 5 (1): 31-69.
- Guardian. 2019. "Usman Khan Attack at London Bridge: What We Know So Far". *The Guardian*, 30 November 2019. (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/nov/30/usman-khan-attack-at-london-bridge-what-we-know-so-far>).
- Guitton, P. 2015. *Adolescence et Djihadisme*. Paris: L'Esprit du Temps.
- Huntington, S. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Jenkins, B. 1975. "International Terrorism: a New Mode of Conflict". In: Carlton, D. and Schaefer, C., ed. *International Terrorism and World Security*, pp. 13-49. London: Croom Helm.
- Juergensmeyer, M. 2017. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.



- Khosrokhavar, F. 2013. "Radicalisation in Prison: The French Case". *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 14 (2): 284-306.
- Koehler, D. 2019. "The Halle, Germany, Attack and the Evolution of the Far-Right Terror Threat". *CTC Sentinel*, 12 (11): 14-20.
- Kundnani, A. 2012. "Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept". *Race and Class*, 54 (2): 3-25.
- Loyd, A. 2019. "Shamima Begum: Bring Me Home, says Bethnal Green Girl Who Left to Join ISIS". *The Times*, 13 February 2019. (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/shamima-begum-bring-me-home-says-bethnal-green-girl-who-fled-to-join-isis-hgvqw765d>).
- McDonald, K. 1999. *Struggles for Subjectivity: Identity, Action and Youth Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McDonald, K. 2013. *Our Violent World: Terrorism in Society*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- McDonald, K. 2015. "From Indymedia to Anonymous: Rethinking Action and Identity in Digital Cultures". *Information, Communication and Society*, 18 (8): 968-982.
- McDonald, K. 2018. *Radicalization*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Nagle, A. 2017. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*. Alresford: Zero Books.
- Rosanvallon, P. 2008. *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roy, O. 2017. *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*. London: Hurst.
- Silber, M. and Bhatt, A. 2007. *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*. New York: New York Police Department.
- Staidenmaier, P. 2014. *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era*. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Thomson, D. 2018. *The Returned: They Left to Wage Jihad, Now They're Back*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Varon, J. 2004. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and the Seventies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Vincent, E. and Chapuis, N. 2019. "Attaque à la Préfecture de Police: La Radicalisation de Mickaël Harpon n'avait pas été Signalée". *Le Monde*, 7 October 2019. ([https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/10/07/la-radicalisation-de-micka-el-harpon-n-avait-pas-ete-signalee\\_6014525\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/10/07/la-radicalisation-de-micka-el-harpon-n-avait-pas-ete-signalee_6014525_3224.html)).



# Frenzied Crowds, Radical Politics and Consolidation of Democracy: The Indian Puzzle

*Subrata K. Mitra*<sup>1</sup>

India emerged as a democratic state from close to two centuries of British colonial rule in 1947. As a changing society with mass poverty, a highly developed political system and a professional civil service, India turned into a noisy but stable democracy. Like other changing societies of the ‘third world’, India too has had its frenzied crowds and political movements of multifarious complexions. Radical movements have emerged as a useful complement to politics based on party competition. Language movements which had rocked Indian democracy in the 1950s, led to the creation of the three-language formula which successfully accommodated the demands within the new States based on mother-tongue, with special protection for linguistic minorities. The same holds for caste-based movements in the 1960s. The biggest challenge in the form of religious conflict led to the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992. However, radical movements that led to these conflicts eventually found accommodation within the democratic political system through a combination of the ballot box and judicialisation. Unlike many of its peers, India’s political system is able to take radical politics in its stride, and even gain momentum from the radical challenge to the state.<sup>2</sup> That leads to a comparative question: why does India succeed where others fail?

My objective in this essay is to explain this Indian exception through an analysis of the sources of radical politics, the methods of India’s coping, and their general implication for the consolidation of democracy. I shall

- 
- 1 Subrata Mitra is emeritus professor of Political Science, Heidelberg University. He can be contacted at [mitra@uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:mitra@uni-heidelberg.de). This is the revised version of a paper presented at a conference on “United by violence, divided by cause? A Comparison of Drivers of Radicalisation in Asia and Europe”, organised by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Singapore, on January 12-14, 2020. I would like to thank Dr. La Toya Waha for her most helpful comments on an earlier version of the paper.
  - 2 Pakistan split into two as a result of the inability of the state to cope with the language movement (Bhasa andolan) that started in the 1950s. Radical demands from Buddhist monks and Tamil nationalists have led Sri Lanka to civil war, and now, a sullen peace.

first analyse the origin and evolution of radical politics, based on class, caste, ethnicity, region and religion. An analysis of the political system that serves as interface of the modern state and traditional society will come in next. This will be set in the context of a dynamic, neo-institutional model of governance which helps the political system to transform rebels into stakeholders and hone the sharp edges of radical politics into the malleable body of conventional politics. I shall conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the Indian model and the scope for further theorisation through cross-national comparison.

### *The Origin of Radical Politics: Competing Paradigms*

Radical politics differs from conventional politics in its scope, strategy and objectives. One normally associates conventional politics with political parties, office-seeking leaders on the campaign-trail and lobbying by interest groups. They focus on the allocation of resources, winning office and engage in the business of ‘who gets what, when and how’ (Lasswell 1936). Radical politicians extend the domain of politics beyond the ken of conventional politics and extend the scope of politics into abstract goals such as the structure of social power and the core values that underpin the political system.<sup>3</sup> Conventional, office-seeking politicians promote their goals through elections, lobbying, interest and pressure groups. Radical politics urges its participants to go beyond normal political methods and engage in protest action. Speaking generally, one can argue that conventional politics focuses on politics ‘within the system’ and radical politics concerns itself with ‘politics of the system’. However, one cannot quite put radical and conventional politics into two exclusive categories. In practice, there may be an overlap between them, which, as we shall see later in the essay, can become a very useful means for the state in its coping strategy.<sup>4</sup> Whereas stable democracies usually succeed in co-opting the radical challenge into the conventional political arena<sup>5</sup>, transitional societies very often fail to ac-

---

3 David Easton in his concept of political systems expands the domain of politics and defines it as the authoritative allocation of values.

4 See figure 3 ‘Radical politics, coping strategies and democratic consolidation: Multiple routes to a common goal’ below.

5 Recent political developments in the West such as the radical upsurge in the UK around the issue of dissociation of the membership of the country with the European Union (commonly referred to as BREXIT) have shown the limitations to the integrative ability of ‘stable’ liberal democracies.

commodate the challengers.<sup>6</sup> Radical, extremist politics can bring the entire edifice of the political system crashing down, leading to the breakdown of order, ending in anarchy, coups d'état, or authoritarian rule.

The factors that lead to the origin of radical politics belong to two different paradigms. The first, the Gurr-Huntington model focuses on relative deprivation – broadly speaking, the gap between expectations and achievements that individuals experience as society changes – which might lead them to defy political order.<sup>7</sup> The second model of radical politics is based on collective actors, asserting abstract values, such as collective identity, defence of what they consider as sacred, or for a collective homeland.<sup>8</sup>

Stable democracies experience radical politics at the fringes of the political system, such as the radical Left and Right, and among disaffected sections of the population, not represented by mainstream parties. However, the conservative dynamism of the system in stable democracies and the capitalist market process usually succeed in absorbing radical challenges into the establishment.<sup>9</sup> Transitional societies, particularly those following the democratic path, prove to be vulnerable to radical politics. The rapid demise of democracy in Afro-Asian, post-colonial democracies, beset by radical movements, is a case in point.

Radical politics in transitional societies emerges from two different groups of people who experience a sense of relative deprivation. Those who held privileged positions in a traditional society might experience a sense of loss when the previously underprivileged sections become assertive, demand higher wages, and the mode of production changes, causing them to lose out in terms of their life style and standard of living. The

---

6 Huntington (1968:55) formulates this in terms of the gap between popular expectations that rise as social mobility gains momentum which easily overtakes the limited state capacity in transitional societies.

7 Gurr defines relative deprivation “as a perceived discrepancy between men’s value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them” Gurr (1970:13).

8 See Anderson (1983, 1991). For the strategic use of cultural identity as the basis of a homeland, see Mitra (1995:57-78). The core concept of using homeland as strategy, see Banton (1977), and Green (1982:236-46). On suicide terrorism as rational strategy, see Waha (2018).

9 The race riots of the 1960s in the United States led to the Great Society initiative of President Johnson and other programmes of positive discrimination, leading eventually to the rise of the Black middle class and greater representation of black leaders in American politics.

sense of anger and confusion they feel contributes to radicalism of the religious Right.<sup>10</sup> The formerly underprivileged, on the other hand, with their new expectations might feel frustrated if their mobility aspirations exceed available opportunities.<sup>11</sup> The desire for a homeland, corresponding to one's primordial identity is a good exemplar of the second paradigm of radicalism at work. In post-colonial states, the demand for territories corresponding to mother tongue has often led to the rise of radical movements. The combination of radical sentiments, emerging from either of the two paradigms, or both, if politically mobilised, can lead to the breakdown of orderly rule, state failure or rise of authoritarian systems.

In the South Asian region, Pakistan broke up on the issue of the rise of Bengali nationalism; Sri Lanka and Nepal have both faced civil wars and Afghanistan is currently facing the steady rise of the Taliban, challenging the regime in power. India, which has also seen vigorous radical politics, is an exception to the trend. The original institutional arrangement and territory of the state have stayed intact over the past seven decades. What explains the resilience of democratic governance and consolidation of democracy in India despite the presence of radical political movements?

*India: 'Million Mutinies Now'*<sup>12</sup>

Social mobility and fragmentation of kinship based, close-knit communities describe the main thrust of Indian politics in the early decades after Independence. Thanks to the introduction of competitive general elections and universal adult franchise, modernisation, social churning, and democratisation have emerged as parallel processes. Castes, key actors in elections, are endogamous status groups, traditionally based on hereditary occupations. Under the impact of democratic competition for power and social reform legislation that has loosened traditional bonds of social hier-

---

10 Whereas the concepts of Left and Right are usually associated with class in the European context, in India the Right usually refers to political forces, drawing their strength from religious mobilisation, which are opposed to secularism as state policy.

11 For a typology of deprivation, see Gurr (1970:47-53).

12 In Heinemann (1991), *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, the third of his Indian trilogy, which followed *India: An Area of Darkness*, and *India: A Wounded Civilization*, V.S. Naipaul gives a haunting image of the spirit of contestation that has shaken up the culture of dominance and subservience that used to be typical of a caste society.

archy, castes (called *jati* in Hindi) have mutated into caste associations – political actors – that draw on social networks. The traditional *caste-system* is gone but castes continue to be politically visible and powerful. Jatis used to be linked to one another through ties of reciprocal economic, social, and political obligation, in a social structure known as the Jajmani system. This social bond was deftly conceptualised by Dumont (1970) as *homo hierarchicus* indicating the superiority of those with higher status over their social inferiors Dumont (1970). The oppressive aspects of the caste system have been increasingly contested by those at the bottom of the pyramid, particularly the former untouchables now referred to as Dalits (in Hindi, oppressed) and the lower castes mentioned in the Constitution, respectively, as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

A post-colonial context like India's, redolent with the spirit of *A Million Mutinies Now* indicates the layers of rage and memories of oppression that underpin Indian society. To quote:

*“...the idea of freedom has gone everywhere in India. Independence was worked for by people more or less at the top; the freedom it brought has worked its way down. People everywhere have ideas now of who they are and what they owe themselves. The process quickened with the economic development that came after independence; what was hidden in 1962, or not easy to see, what perhaps was only in a state of becoming, has become clearer. The liberation of spirit that has come to India could not come as release alone. In India, with its layer below layer of distress and cruelty, it had to come as disturbance. It had to come as rage and revolt. India was now a country of a million little mutinies”* (Naipaul 1991:517).

The question that emerges from these observations is why does the radicalism of the masses not add up to large scale political disorder in India? The answer to this question lies in the fact that India's enraged masses are driven by political ambitions that can act as an incentive to take the struggle away from the streets and take it to the parliament, the civil servants and failing all else, to the media and civil society.

### *India's 'Transactional' Radicalism*

Caste groupings in Indian politics are best seen as rational entrepreneurs who are keen on using their relative strength for political benefit. Castes used to derive their tenacity from the uniformity of occupation. So long as members of a caste plied the same occupation, they were inescapably con-

scious of their belonging to the same caste. The remarkable achievement of social reform policies has been to rupture the link of caste and occupation. Thanks to the undermining of the material basis of the caste system, people born into a particular caste can look forward to mobility beyond their traditional occupation and the status that went with it. “Dissociated from its material roots, the consciousness of caste become purely formal, and a badge of politically convenient self-classification, to be manipulated and waved when necessary. A Chamar [cobbler caste] does not automatically, and instinctively, *think* of himself as a Chamar: rather he now presents himself as one to secure certain advantages. His being is detached from his consciousness, and that is a remarkable gain” (Parekh and Mitra 1990:106-107).<sup>13</sup>

A whole slew of social and economic reform legislation, quotas for socially marginal sections of the population that go by the name of ‘reservation’ and the generic message of democracy – enfranchisement, entitlement and empowerment – have combined to challenge the very basis of the caste system. The spread of political consciousness, electoral mobility, legislation and administrative action, and social mobility brought about by economic change have combined to challenge the legitimacy of social dominance based on caste status alone and severed the link of caste and occupation. This has led to considerable social strife and social fragmentation.

### *The ‘Responsive’ State and ‘Banalisation’ of Radical Politics*

In India, the methods of radical politics spans between system-tolerated forms of protest action such as *gherao*, (Hindi for surrounding a decision-maker) *dharna*, (Hindi for peaceful demonstration, literally, by lying prostrate in front of the decision-maker) boycott, all the way to collective violence and suicide terrorism. Protest movements, including those with a certain degree of violence are quite common in India. They emerge as an act of complaint against a specific grievance, gather momentum if they have a cause that is widely shared and an effective leadership with good communication abilities is available to mobilise these elements into a mass

---

13 The ubiquitous presence of castes and their radical rhetoric are strategic manoeuvres to gain political and material advantages. Parekh and Mitra add: “Caste consciousness is a ladder he uses to climb out of a social cul-de-sac, and having got to the top he kicks it away. The dialectic of reservation is far more subtle than is generally appreciated” (Parekh and Mitra 1990:106-107).



movement. Often, the violence that results when protestors disobey orders meant to prohibit their actions soon adds ‘police outrage’ as an additional support to their cause. The life cycle of the movement comes to an end once a settlement is made. As a matter of fact, as one has seen time and again, and most recently in the case of the Anna Hazare Movement against public corruption, protest movements become an additional entry point for new issues, leaders and political vocabulary in India’s noisy but effective democracy. This movement transformed itself into a political party called Aam Admi Party (AAP, in Hindi, “a party of ordinary people”) whose leader Kejriwal eventually went on to become the Chief Minister of Delhi. ‘Rational’ protest thus complemented institutional participation, spreading the message of democracy, empowering those who have been outside the tent, and contributing to the resilience of democracy in a non-Western setting.

A plethora of political parties, elections, pressure groups, judicial interventions and public commissions, security forces, civil service at federal, regional and local levels jostle for space and influence in the public sphere, generate and implement public policies. Alongside normal political process, there is still space for radical politics as a complementary process. The existence of multiple modes of interest articulation and aggregation, combining conventional methods of campaign participation, voting, lobbying and contacting leaders and administrators with indigenous forms of protest has become an effective basis for governance, transition to democracy and its consolidation in India. The fortuitous legacy of Gandhian Satyagraha which had blended participation in elections with limited suffrage and rational protest in a seemingly seamless flow under colonial rule, has developed many variants in India after Independence. These have taken very different forms in regions with well-settled administrative structures as West Bengal, Bihar and Maharashtra. The response of the Indian state to radical politics differs greatly from that in more troubled regions such as Kashmir, the North-East, and the ‘red corridor’ of India, linking the hill districts of central and eastern India with pockets of Naxalite strength, in the South.<sup>14</sup>

---

14 The strategy of engagement with radical movements that the Indian state has followed has been region-specific. In general, areas at the frontiers with geo-political implications (e.g. India’s North-East and Jammu and Kashmir) have had more of the stick than the carrot, by the way of the application of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which gives armed forces some special powers to engage with political forces fighting against the state.

India's hyper-active media, NGOs, pro-active judiciary and national political parties give articulation to these regional and local phenomena. Thanks to the multiple modes of participation, state-society relations in India benefit from systematic intermediation of both modern and traditional institutions, creating an ethos of effective and continuous interaction, which helps rebels become stakeholders, or at least aspire to join the ranks of the ruling elite in a conceivable future. The combined effect of all these methods is to dull the sharp edges of class and ethnic conflict and to transform what could have become a state of polarised conflict into a series of protracted negotiations. As such, even while an effective electoral route to power exists, nevertheless the undemocratic route seems to have a parallel life of its own. This adds a touch of ambivalence to democratic consolidation in India.

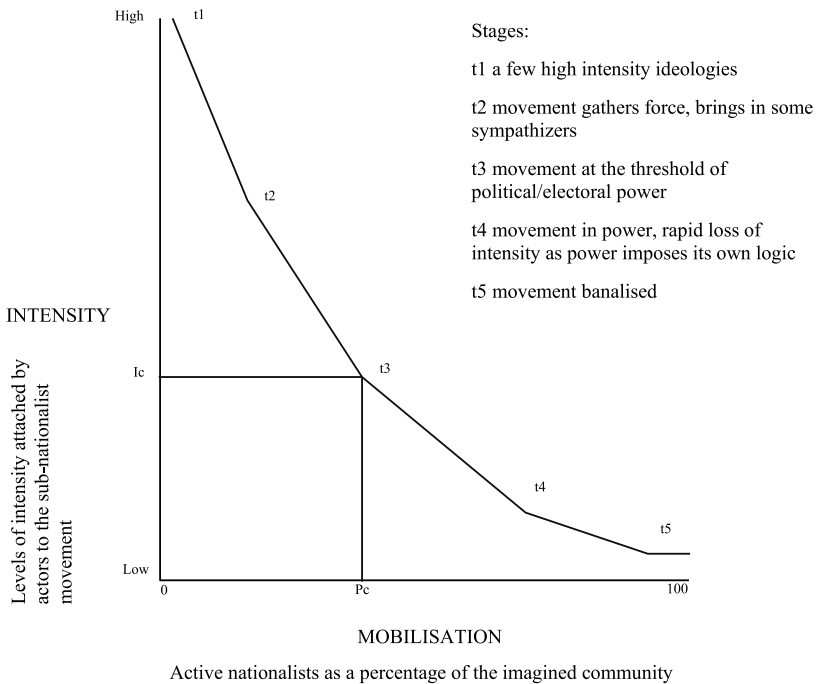
The overlap of conventional and radical politics can give an ambiguous profile to the concept of radical politics and its location within the social and political space. This contributes to the uncertainty that marks the interpretation of radical activism to democratic transition and consolidation.

How these different types evolve and with what consequence for democratisation depends on a number of factors. Most important of these are the salience that the leading radical activists attach to their shared goal, the number and territorial catchment of the 'imagined' community they draw on, and the response of the state.<sup>15</sup> One can trace the evolution of sub-national movements (figure 1, below), as an exemplar of the evolution of radical politics, its transformation into a movement and eventually, the entry of the movement to State politics.

---

15 Some 'imagined' communities seek to revive a pre-modern political and cultural space for which historical evidence is available whereas others create a community on the basis of deeply shared sentiments. The former is the case of the movements to create a separate State of Telangana. A similar movement to create a 'Kosala' State in Odisha has been less successful in the absence of comparable historical evidence. See Mitra (2014:372-398).

Figure 1: Sub-National Movements



Ic critical threshold of intensity, beyond which nationalism becomes 'visible' over and above 'mundane' politics

Pc critical threshold of numbers beyond which those adhering to nationalism constitute a political force

Source: Mitra (1999:207).

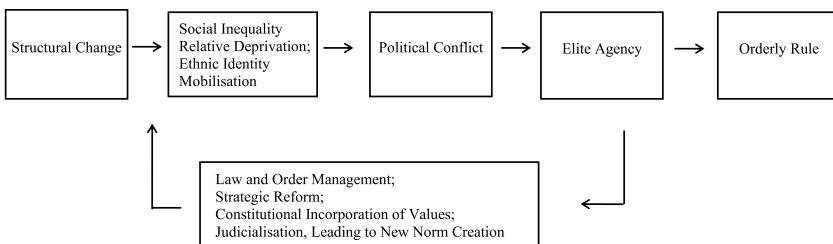
Figure 1 represents the life cycle of a movement that starts with a radical demand for a homeland for a distinctive people. Such movements, led by a handful of activists, begin with spectacular acts of symbolic politics such as suicide for the cause. Their numbers are few in the beginning (time t1 in the figure where one can see the relatively small number in the horizontal axis, but very high intensity in the vertical axis). The Indian state typically reacts with a mixed strategy of accommodation and repression. Typically, such movements go through a transformation as they gain in strength. The average intensity of the movement comes down as numbers grow, and the leadership seeks to exercise its authority over the followers. As the transformation of Assam into eight different States, or creation of new entities

such as Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Telangana shows, such movements eventually lead to the creation of new federal States where the leaders of the separatist movement become the new rulers. Many of these movements have pre-Independence origins, going back to the 1920s when the Indian National Congress recognised the salience of regional identities and organised its provincial committees based on linguistically contiguous areas. As their numbers grow, average intensity (i.e., the readiness of participants to trade off conventional rewards of politics in favour of radical demands) lessens. Eventually, the movement enters electoral competition by organising itself as a party, and, if successful in winning a majority, becomes a ruling party in the new State, corresponding to its homeland. Out of the engagement with such movements, the Indian state has developed the concept of as a ‘cooperative’ federalism – a form of power-sharing – in which national, State and local governments interact cooperatively and collectively to solve common problems rather than acting in an adversarial mode.

*India’s Dynamic, Neo-Institutional Model of Governance*

A dynamic, neo-institutional model of governance (figure 2, below) which underpins India’s political system, helps the state accommodate radical movements into the fabric of the country’s resilient democracy (Mitra 2008:1-23). By drawing on the logic of human ingenuity, driven by self-interest, the innovation of appropriate rules and procedures, and most of all – agency of elites and their followers – one can explain how policies, institutions and processes that respond to popular demands can enhance governance.

*Figure 2: A Dynamic Neo-Institutional Model of Governance*



Source: the author.

The model of governance depicted in figure 2 builds on the basic idea of relative deprivation, germane to the Gurr-Huntington model. Thus, political change induced by decolonisation can lead to radical movements based on a sense of resentment against social inequality of the caste system, relative deprivation based on caste conflict, or demands for a homeland, leading to ethnic identity mobilisation. These radical demands lead to conflict Huntington (1968:55). However, the presence of an elite decision-making body which is sensitive to such demands and makes appropriate policies based on law and order management, strategic social and economic reform, constitutional incorporation of values that the radical movements consider non-negotiable and provides a judicial window for adjudication of radical demands.

The model derives its strength from the logic of rational choice and game theory. Radical demands emerge as zero-sum games where the state and radical movements face each other as adversaries. However, a midpoint, jointly devised by politicians aware of both sides of the argument, and civil servants adept at transforming such compromises into appropriate policy can bring satisfaction to both sides. In a social context, where individuals face each other daily and can expect to do so over the foreseeable future, their proximity to one another and knowledge of each other might induce them to what Axelrod (1984) calls 'tit for tat', which is to say, people learn to reciprocate like with like.<sup>16</sup>

If the political system violates deeply held values and beliefs which people consider sacred and non-negotiable then rule-infracton can become a good in itself. Tamil identity in the southern State of Madras was strong enough to 'kill or die for' in the 1950s, but once Tamil identity was constitutionally guaranteed as the basic structure of politics in the region renamed Tamil Nadu (the home of the Tamil people), governance bounced back. If the core values and symbols of a society are constitutionally protected, then governance is likely to be higher.

Social life is recursive. Since there is a 'tomorrow', the actor sees the incentive in investing in goodwill and social capital. Thus, following Axelrod, knowledge, proximity, reciprocity and recursiveness, can lead radical adversaries to cooperate. Political actors who generally resort to self-help can learn to understand and abide by social norms. Compliance, in this case, emerges from a combination of regulation and self-regulation. Trust,

---

16 The conditions under which cooperation among egoists can evolve is the main focus of Axelrod (1984).

shared norms and social networks that result from such institutional arrangements enhance governance.

The incorporation of new social elites and creation of new political arenas enhances governance. Power-sharing – turning rebels into stakeholders – makes compliance attractive and reduces the need or temptation of non-compliance. Governance can be improved by converting potential rule breakers into legislators, provided they enjoy political support within the community. Successful and credible electoral democracy turns poachers into gamekeepers. Institutional arrangements based on the logic of federalism and consociational forms of power-sharing promote governance.

Factors such as effective initiation and implementation of reform and law and order management which enhance governance can be specified in terms of the model presented in figure 2. Political institutions, as interfaces of society and state can play a crucial role in this context (March and Olsen 1984:738-49). This concept alerts us to the crucial room to manoeuvre that institutions can provide the new elites with (Mitra 1991). Further dynamism is added to the model by leaving open the criteria of legitimate political action to political actors at the local and regional levels. The response of the decision-making elites to crises through law and order management, strategic reform and redistributive policies, and constitutional change in order to give legitimacy to contested, embedded values, acts as a feedback loop that affects the perception of the crucial variables by people at the local and regional levels.

The dynamic neo-institutional model of governance (figure 2) brings these ideas together. It is based on elite decision-making that combines law and order management, strategic social and economic reform, judicialisation of conflicts and constitutional incorporation of core social values has helped the Indian state cope with radical challenges. India's significant achievement in the area of positive discrimination which has successfully severed the cultural and economic links between caste and occupation (Mitra 1999), and legislation which whittled away social privilege, bear ample testimony to the change that has come about democratically. When elite initiatives result in redistributive policies and constitutional change, they lead to the reduction of perceived inequality and accommodation of normative issues such as that of group identity. Once abstract issues like values and identity are incorporated into the constitution through appropriate changes in the rules of the game and creation of new arenas, politics within the reconstituted units reverts to the everyday politics of conflict over material interests.

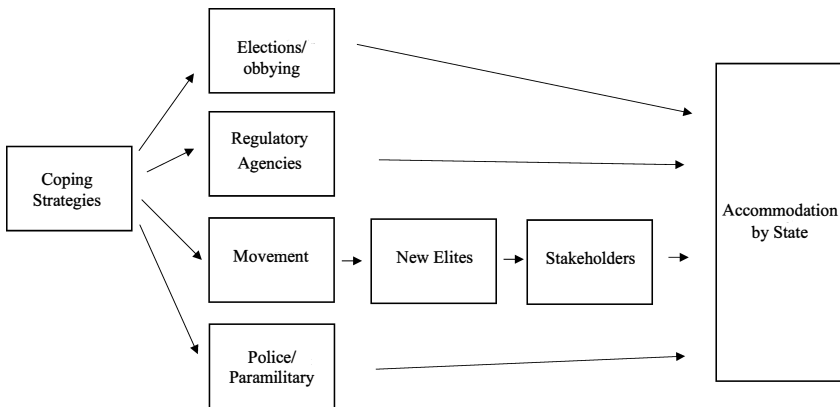
This neo-institutional model of governance incorporates at least four parameters. A bureaucratic state machinery combines policy responsiveness

and law and order management. Elections, to all levels of the political system help with contribution to agenda setting by elected political leaders and local protest movements. Elections transform social elites into political elites who use two-track strategies that combine both institutional and non-institutional modes of action (Mitra 1991). Finally, elected governments who wish to retain their popularity and electability make strategic use of social reform and institutional change, which they see as political resources.<sup>17</sup>

*Radical Politics and Representation: Multiple Routes to Similar Goal*

The discussion of India's mode of governance in the above section will help illuminate the multiple modes of political action available to the state and the radical activist. The paths indicated in figure 3 show the multiple routes that are available to radical activists in India.

*Figure 3: Radical Politics, Coping Strategies and Political Accommodation: Multiple Routes to a Common Goal*



Source: the author.

17 This model, which approaches the problem of challenges to political stability distinguishes itself from the structural-functional approaches because of its methodological individualism, the incorporation of rules as an endogenous variable and the specification of cultural and historical contexts as exogenous constraints that account for the bounded rationality of the actors.

The first of these methods is for the state to encourage radical activists to engage the state by entering elections, or negotiating directly with the government. A perusal of everyday politics in India's North-East will show how the government continuously attempts to bring radical secessionists to negotiation, even when some of their demands are considered unconstitutional or unrealistic. The second method is to facilitate judicial adjudication of radical demands. India's Supreme Courts has developed the doctrine of public interest litigation (PIL) through which radical groups, particularly those agitating for the environment, as well as those who contest state action in the area of law and order, can approach the judiciary by filing a writ petition (Schusser 2018). The third method of engagement is to let the radical movement follow its lifecycle (figure 1, above) and engage it once it receives a popular mandate. The Telangana movement is a good example of this mode of action. The fourth method is the use of force to set up an upper limit beyond which radical movements are warned not to go, beyond which they risk of facing up to the full firepower of the state.

We have seen time and again, how, leaders, espousing radical demands, can directly approach administrators and policy makers for implementation of state policies if they found them lacking, call on regulatory agencies like the judiciary and the media to vent their grievances. Thus, radical activists eventually enrich the social base of politics by contributing new leadership to supplement the existing group of elites. Democracy consolidation happens when orderly, democratic rule takes place, with the induction of new elites from below. Thanks to this policy of turning 'rebels into stakeholders', India has been able to adapt an important model of governance into a political system appropriate to local needs and custom.

### *The Moderation of Radical Political Parties: The Central Tendency in Indian Politics*

India's electoral system, based on single member constituencies, simple majority voting systems, and free and fair polls have encouraged the full spectrum of political forces present in the country to take to the electoral route to power.<sup>18</sup> In contrast with proportional representation, the form of representation chosen by India encourages the formation of broad-based

---

18 However, to be able to compete in elections one needs to take an oath of loyalty to the constitution. This excludes political forces like the Naxalites and terrorists who explicitly espouse violence as their mode of action.



coalitions, on a short term basis. This blunts the edge of exclusive ideologies. Such was their confidence in electoral democracy that the Government of India led by Jawaharlal Nehru permitted both Communists and the Hindu nationalist Jan Sangh to take part in the first general elections of 1951-52. Neither did particularly well in terms of seats gained, but their inclusion in the electoral process was an effective method of moderating extremist ideologies.<sup>19</sup>

The violent peasant uprising in Telangana in 1946-48 which was put down by the Indian army led to an internal struggle between a radical and a moderate factions of the Communist Party of India. However, participation in the general election of 1951-52 and the 20<sup>th</sup> party congress of the CPSU which endorsed the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism made it possible for the CPI to moderate its stand on violent revolution as its official ideology. The CPI faced a major crisis in 1962 when the Sino-Indian conflict broke out. The faction of the party that took the side of the Chinese split from the CPI and came to be known as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was a radical communist party. However, its growing strength saw it into elected power in Tripura, West Bengal and Kerala where the party formed government, under the Indian constitution! From the point of view of radical Marxism in India, this was a pyrrhic victory because it caused the next split in India's communist movement between pro-system and anti-system factions, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), also referred to as Naxalites was born. Split into several factions – warring against the state police as well as one another – this tendency continues to embrace the strategy of violent revolution as the 'correct' form of radical politics. However, its impact is steadily on the wane.

The view from the Right is almost symmetrical. The Jan Sangh, which represented the voice of the Hindu Right, started its post-Independence career with the opprobrium of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic. However, the party learnt to coalesce with other opposition parties in the 1960s when the Congress dominance declined and multiparty coalitions became the rule. It is this strategy which got the party to enter the Union government in 1977 as part of the Janata coalition. When this fell apart, most of the members of the Jan Sangh came out and formed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which followed a relatively moderate line. Its

---

19 We learn from Downs (1957) that party competition under single majority rules will lead to a convergence to the median. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph (1987) have formulated it as the 'moderation thesis' and shown how extremist parties in India have gradually converged to the middle of the ideological spectrum.

championship of the cause of building a temple on the spot where the Babri Mosque stood enhanced its popularity. In the course of its rapid rise to power, the party had drawn on the desire of many Hindus to see a more prominent role for Hindu culture within the institutions of the secular state and to deny special treatments to minorities, such as a special status for the Muslim majority State of Jammu and Kashmir. When the mosque was demolished by a mob of Hindu zealots, the State government of Uttar Pradesh, led by the BJP, accepted responsibility for its failure to uphold law and order and resigned. Subsequently, the imperatives of India's coalitional politics have caused the party to moderate its stand on cultural and confessional issues. During the short-lived tenure of Vajpayee as Prime Minister (1998-1999), the party spoke more of good governance and less of Hindu nationalism. Back in office in 1999 and with a clear majority for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), of which the BJP was the largest partner in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Vajpayee announced government to follow the same moderate policies that he had launched during his previous tenure. However, ambivalence persisted as the NDA manifesto did take the temple issue on board, albeit in a muted fashion. It said, "We continue to hold that the judiciary's verdict in this matter should be accepted by all. At the same time, efforts should be intensified for dialogue and a negotiated settlement in an atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill" (National Democratic Alliance 2004). Despite continued acts of radical behaviour by fringe Right wing groups, under Prime Minister Modi, *sabka sath, sabka vikas*, (together with all, development for all) has become the official doctrine of the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, 'the Indian People's Party').

However, just as among left radicals, the dilemma among right radicals persists. The Hindu nationalist movement is constantly caught in the dilemma between political mobilisation vs. electoral representation, integration vs. accommodation, ideology vs. populism, *shakha* (cadre) vs. *janata* (mass, people). Many suspect the BJP of running with the hare and hunting with the hound, for they are inclined to go along with electoral democracy as long as it brings in the power. But when it does not gain power, or control slips, the political leadership tends to wake up the sleeping giant of a mobilised majority Hindu community.

### *Beyond Alterity: Indian 'Exceptionalism' Explained*

Has India found a unique, idiosyncratic route to democracy transition and consolidation or is the Indian solution capable of being understood in gen-

eral terms? An analysis of radical politics helps appreciate the kaleidoscopic character of Indian politics. Protest movements including those with a certain degree of violence are quite common in India. They emerge as an act of complaint against a specific grievance, gather momentum if they have a cause that is widely shared and an effective leadership with good communication abilities is available to mobilise these elements into a mass movement. The life cycle of the movement comes to an end when a settlement is made.<sup>20</sup> ‘Rational’ protest thus complements institutional participation, spreading the message of democracy, empowering those who have been outside the tent, and contributing to the resilience of democracy in a non-Western setting. The conflation of radical and conventional politics has thus contributed to the deepening and broadening of Indian democracy. The Indian case reinforces the general lesson that anti-system politics, under certain conditions, can actually help in consolidating democracy.

The conflation of radical and conventional politics within the structure of the neo-institutional model of governance has been an important step in democracy transition and consolidation of India. The Indian political system has built this on the residual legacy of Gandhian *Satyagraha*. As a young barrister, Gandhi had discovered the potential of combining institutional participation and rational protest for the assertion of democratic rights in South Africa and transformed this ‘experiment’, with his insuperable political skill, into the concept of *Satyagraha*. On his return to India, he supplemented this with two further concepts – *swadeshi* and *Swaraj* – which became the firm basis of an enduring link between India’s civil society and the abstract goal of independence from British colonial rule.<sup>21</sup> Other images add to the confusing signals that India sends out to democrats across the world. Entrenched insurgencies, hectoring candidates in the

---

20 As a matter of fact, as one has seen time and again, and most recently in the case of the Anna Hazare Movement against public corruption, protest movements become an additional entry point for new issues, leaders and political vocabulary in India’s noisy but effective democracy.

21 Gandhi, the quintessential lawyer and activist, was particularly keen to define the norms of the core concepts that underpinned his brand of civil society activism. Thus, *Satyagraha* had to be more than a mere struggle for power and had to have a moral basis that transcended the interest of the adversaries and placed the agenda at a higher level of synthesis. *Swaraj* referred to self-rule – a shade higher in terms of the moral basis of power than mere independence. *Swadeshi* – literally, the consumption of goods produced in India – connected Indian producers to the Indian consumers, thus, adding to the political agenda the salience of economic independence from foreign rule. The triad of concepts became part of the core ideas of Indian democracy.

campaign mode and serpentine lines of men and women patiently waiting to exercise their franchise exist side by side, each of them pressing its claim in the name of democratic rights.

### *Conclusion*

Images of rampaging crowds, pitched battles between demonstrators and the forces of law and order, wanton destruction of public and private property, from Hong Kong, Paris and Kolkata, and large swathes of South America and Africa denote waves of protest sweeping over the globalising world. A perusal of the Indian media, on any single day, comes up with a rich harvest of protest, some of which has turned violent.<sup>22</sup> Few countries today are immune to this surge of radical politics. However, while political order in some countries breaks down in the face of radical movements, India appears to be able to cope more successfully. The detailed analysis of residual radicalism of Maoist groups in Eastern India, Islamic radicalism in Kashmir and some ethnic separatist movements in India's North-East is not possible within the limited space of this article. With these exceptions, Indian experience of coping with radical politics has been generally successful in coping with challenges from the Left and the Right. The significance of the Indian case lies in the fact that radical politics, rather than weakening the foundations of the state and the roots of democratic institutions, actually reinforces it. This article has analysed this puzzling case of the Indian exception, and drawn some implications for the accommodation of radical politics within the structure of representative democracy.

Radicalism in India is 'transactional' in the sense that radical movements articulate extreme political demands. However, once they have articulated them and added them to the political agenda, they engage in the conventional politics of negotiation, leading, ultimately to some form of accommodation. Election-fuelled political competition has blunted the sharp edges of radical ideology and led to democratic social policies. These have helped accommodate political cleavages based on region, religion, class, caste, and tribe within the democratic political system. In fact, it is this interaction which has conflated the norms of Western liberal democ-

---

22 See *The Hindu* (14 December 2019) for a detailed account of radical protest against the recent amendments to the Citizenship Law of India. The importance of foreign reactions to these radical movements can be seen in the advisories issued by France, Israel, the US and the UK for their nationals travelling to India.

racy and the Indian context. All of these developments have enhanced the legitimacy of democratic politics in India. Legislations, like the Right to Information (RTI), which have helped civil society activism and bring radical politicians into the fold of conventional politics. The availability of a radical route has cut the ground from under the feet of revolutionary politics and underground organisations which have stymied democratic politics in many transitional societies.

The Indian exception has come about through visionary leadership, the historical legacy of limited elections under the British raj, the no-holds-barred electoral competition for power in India after Independence, and the two-track strategy of the state, combining accommodation and repression. Coalition politics has bolstered the ‘fungibility’ of ideology and power in India. That, in turn, has enhanced the transactional character of radical politics. Indian democracy, by engaging with deep-seated grievances of ordinary people and listening to their radical demands, has been able to guide its political aspirants to the polling booth. The electoral process has become the only realistic path to office and power in India.<sup>23</sup> This, probably, is the most important take-away from the Indian case in a cross-national comparison of radical politics and its resolution.

## References

- Anderson, Benedict. 1991 [1883]. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Axelrod, Robert. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Banton, Michel. 1977. “Rational Choice: A Theory of Racial and Ethnic Relations”. *Working Paper on Ethnic Relations*, No. 8, University of Bristol.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Dumont, Louis. 1970. *Home Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (Complete Revised English Edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Green, Leslie. 1982. “Rational Nationalists”. *Political Studies* 30: 236-46.

---

23 One hears the magisterial voice of Charles Tilly who had castigated the reflex reaction of states in describing radical politics as irrational. Tilly had questioned simplistic theories of social conflict that casts civil society activists as apolitical. “The image”, Tilly had remarked, commenting on such theories, “is hydraulic: hardship increases, pressure builds up, the vessel bursts. The angry individual acts as a reservoir of resentment, a conduit of tension, a boiler of fury. But not as a thinking, political man operating on principle” Tilly (1975:390).

- Gurr, Ted Robert. 1970. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Heinemann, William. 1991 [1990]. *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. London: Quality Paperbacks Direct.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lasswell, Harold. 1936. *Who Gets What, When and How*. New York: Whittlesey House.
- March, James and Olsen, Johan P. 1984. "The New Institutionalism: Organisational Factors in Political Life". *American Political Science Review*, 78: 738-49.
- Mitra, Subrata. 1995. "Rational Politics of Cultural Nationalism: Sub-national Movements in South Asia in Comparative Perspective". *British Journal of Political Science* 25: 57-78.
- Mitra, Subrata. 1999. *Culture and Rationality: The Politics of Social Change in Post-Colonial India*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Mitra, Subrata. 2008. "Elite Agency and Governance in Changing Societies: India in Comparative Perspective". *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 16 (1): 1-23.
- Mitra, Subrata. 2014. "The Kosala Movement in Western Odisha: Sub-Regional Sentiments, Countervailing Identities and Stalemated Sub-Nationalism". *India Review*, 13 (4): 372-398.
- Parekh, Bhikhu and Mitra, Subrata. 1990. "The Logic of Anti-Reservation Discourse in India". In Mitra, Subrata ed. *Politics of Positive Discrimination*, pp: 106-107. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.
- Rudolph, Lloyd and Rudolph, Susanne. 1987. *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schusser, Fabian. 2018. *Judicial Activism in a Comparative Perspective: The Supreme Court Of India vs. the Bundesverfassungsgericht*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- The Hindu. "Citizenship Act Protests: France, Israel, U.S., U.K. Issue Travel Advisories". 14 December 2019.
- Tilly, Charles. 1975. *The Formation of Nation-States in Western Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Waha, La Toya. 2018. *Religion and State-Formation in Transitional Societies: Sri Lanka in a Comparative Perspective*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

# Radicalisation, Terrorism and Democratisation in Southeast Asia

*Aurel Croissant*

## *Introduction*

In the past five decades or so, Southeast Asian societies experienced multiple transformations, which continue to have a deep impact on the social fabric. The region has been home of some of the most impressive success stories of economic growth and human development in the post-World War II period. Starting in Singapore in the early 1970s and followed by Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, the region as a whole achieved and sustained a remarkable rate of economic growth, faster than in any other regional grouping in the world in the same period, except for Northeast Asia. In the 1990s and 2000s, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia also made significant progress in terms of economic growth and human development. In the 2010s, even Myanmar has begun to recover from 50 years of military-imposed desolation (Coxhead 2018).

Growth and modernisation have improved the livelihood of hundreds of millions of Southeast Asians. At the same time, however, the “pursuit of rushed development” has resulted in a “compressed modernity” that has “strained the social fabric of the societies” and “neglected the democratic process” (Dragolov, Koch and Larsen 2018:100). For sure, Southeast Asia has seen transitions from authoritarian rule to democratic governance in recent decades and the number of democracies increased from zero in 1975 to four in 2005 (Croissant and Bünte 2012). This said, there is a growing concern that – after a period of political liberalisation and of democratic opening – democracy is backsliding in Southeast Asia as countries such as Cambodia, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, and Indonesia exemplified a continued decay of democratic institutions, rights, freedoms and norms in the past ten years, or so (Croissant 2019).

In addition to socio-economic modernisation and political liberalisation, a third trend has shaped regional trajectories in recent decades. According to many analysts, Southeast Asia also became a breeding ground for militant Islam and “jihadist structures” with an international backing emerged throughout the region (Kurlantzick 2016). Terrorist groups in

Southeast Asia have been joining ranks with the so-called “Islamic State” (IS) since 2014 (Abuza and Clarke 2019). The five-month long fighting between Philippine security forces and Islamist militants affiliated with IS around the city of Marawi on the Mindanao Island in 2017 demonstrate what Islamist militants are capable of (Tigno 2018). According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), there have been a total of 873 terrorist incidents in Southeast Asia in 2018, with 619 people killed and another 886 wounded, though not all of them can be attributed to Islamist militancy (START 2019).

Although conflict research has been dealing with intra-state conflicts in Southeast Asia for a long time, research on political radicalisation and terrorism in the region is of a more recent origin. Much of the literature on radicalisation focuses on Islamist extremism and jihadist terrorism, though many groups involved in the numerous ethno-nationalist or ideology-driven conflicts in Southeast Asia do not meet the standard definitions of terrorism (Croissant and Barlow 2007). As in other regions, the debate over so-called “counter-radicalization policies” (della Porta, 2018:462) brought about “the emergence of government-funded industries of advisors, analysts, scholars, entrepreneurs and self-appointed community representatives” (Kundani 2012:3). Despite its popularity, academic researchers find it hard to agree on what the concept of “radicalisation” actually means and on what causes radicalisation in general; therefore, our knowledge about the effectiveness of different measures of counter-radicalisation remains deficient, to a considerable extent.

In recent years, a strand of research has emerged which, in different ways, asks whether there is a causal link between democracy and the occurrence of terrorism. For example, Abidie (2006), Chenoweth (2013) and Magen (2018) investigate whether democracies are less vulnerable to the threat of terrorism than other types of regime and whether democracy has built-in advantages in preventing large-scale political radicalisation. Other authors, such as Huq (2018), examine possible causal paths along which acts of terrorism might lead to a decline in democratic practices and, related to this, how democratic recession deepens problems of political radicalism and armed violence.

What is the relationship between radicalisation into terrorism, democratisation and democratic backsliding in Southeast Asia? Building on recent contributions in the field of comparative politics and conflict studies, I argue that in parts of Southeast Asia, the rise of ethno-religious radicalism and political militancy correlates with the emergence of incomplete or electoral democracy and is a consequence of what I describe as the vicious cycle of political radicalisation and democratic backsliding. The



rest of my analysis proceeds in five steps. In Section 2, I clarify my key concepts and develop my theoretical argument. The following Section 3 provides a brief overview of the nature and recent trends in terrorist activities in the region and analyses patterns of democratisation in Southeast Asia. The fourth part of my chapter investigates Southeast Asian government responses to radicalisation. Furthermore, this section examines the causal mechanisms that link government responses to the occurrence of radicalisation and terrorism within a polity to that polity's democratic decline. The final section summarises the findings and presents some tentative conclusions.

### *Groundwork: Some Definitions*

It is helpful to begin by clarifying three key terms – radicalisation, democracy, and democratic backsliding. Each is highly contested, in part because each depends not just on empirical, but on normative criteria.

### *Radicalisation*

Recent reviews of the state-of-the art in terrorism and social movement studies together present several dozens of definitions of radicalisation (Schmid 2013; della Porta 2018). Yet, recent conceptual debates seem to converge around a few common themes, which suggest that radicalisation:

- a) Takes place at the micro-level of the individual, but interacts with conditions at the meso-levels of social groups, movements or organizations, and the macro-levels of the broader society;
- b) Denotes the adoption of some form of “non-moderate ideologies” (della Porta 2018) or worldviews by individuals, which legitimate the use of violent means as ultima ratio;
- c) Involves a process that stems from “complex and contingent sets of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutional actors” and which takes place “during encounters between social movements and authorities, in a series of reciprocal adjustments” (Malthaner 2011);
- d) Involves some element of repressive policing of protest or everyday experience of physical confrontation by some individuals, or solidarisation of individuals who do not have such personal experiences with groups that are considered to be victimised.

The Italian political sociologists Donatella della Porta, considered as the leading authority in social movement studies and contentious politics, defines radicalisation narrowly as a “process of escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time” (2018:462). According to her understanding, radicalisation

“takes place during encounters between social movements and authorities, in a series of reciprocal adjustments. Repeated clashes with police and political adversaries gradually, and almost imperceptibly, heighten radicalism, leading to a justification for ever more violent forms of action. In parallel, radical groups interact with a supportive environment, in which they find logistical help as well as symbolic rewards” (op. cit.:463).

In contrast to della Porta’s “relational perspective” of radicalisation, the Dutch terrorism scholar Alex P. Schmid offers a definition that is more closely embedded in the scholarly discourse on terrorism. Based on an in-depth literature review, he “re-conceptualizes” radicalisation as

“an individual or collective (group) process whereby, usually in a situation of political polarisation, normal practices of dialogue, compromise and tolerance between political actors and groups with diverging interests are abandoned by one or both sides in a conflict dyad in favour of a growing commitment to engage in confrontational tactics of conflict-waging. These can include either (i) the use of (non-violent) pressure and coercion, (ii) various forms of political violence other than terrorism or (iii) acts of violent extremism in the form of terrorism and war crimes. The process is, on the side of rebel factions, generally accompanied by an ideological socialization away from mainstream or status quo-oriented positions towards more radical or extremist positions involving a dichotomous world view and the acceptance of an alternative focal point of political mobilization outside the dominant political order as the existing system is no longer recognized as appropriate or legitimate” (Schmid 2013:18).

While narrow definitions of radicalisation discussed here have the advantage of being able to make a clear distinction between “radicalised” and (not yet) “non-radicalised”, Gaspar and co-authors (2018) criticise that those concepts treat the use of violence as a defining feature of radicalisation. They argue that such a narrow understanding leads scholars to overlook long-term processes of (nonviolent) radicalisation leading up to violent behaviour. They argue that a distinction should be made between radicalisation *into* violence, radicalisation *of* violence and radicalisation *without* violence. Furthermore, they posit that radicalisation is not necessarily related to challenging or fighting against an existing political order. Gaspar et al. (2018:7) therefore speak more generally of “normative orders”

against which radicalisation is directed, whereby this order can be political, social, economic, religious or otherwise.

### *Democracy*

The age-old political science debate on what democracy is or should mean fills more than one library. For the purpose of this study, it is sufficient to acknowledge that actual empirical research on democratisation relies on a procedural understanding of democracy. Still, the debate is whether a minimal and essentially electoral understanding of democracy (“polyarchy”; cf. Dahl 1971) is sufficient or if democracy should also include the presence of more substantial elements, such as the rule of law and constitutionalism (Croissant and Merkel 2019). The analysis at hand builds on the differentiation of four types of political regimes – two democratic ones and two authoritarian ones – that have been proposed by scholars who are part of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). The two types of democratic regimes are the electoral and the liberal democracy. In “electoral democracies”, democratically elected “rulers are de-facto accountable to citizens through periodic elections” (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018:4). Following the V-Dem operationalisation of electoral democracy, only those regimes qualify as democracies that regularly hold sufficiently free and fair, de-facto multiparty elections (ibid.). In addition to fulfilling the criteria for electoral democracy, a “liberal democracy” is characterised by an additional set of individual and minority rights beyond the electoral sphere. Core components of a liberal democracy include legislative and judicial oversight over the executive providing checks and balances, as well as the protection of individual liberties, including access to, and equality before, the law (ibid.). Because the electoral democracies lack the liberal qualities of a liberal democracy, some scholars describe those political regimes also as “illiberal democracies” (Zakaria 1997; Merkel 2004).

In contrast, autocracies do not regularly hold sufficiently free and fair, de-facto multiparty elections. Again, there are two types of political regimes. The first type of “electoral autocracies” includes political regimes in which the chief executive and seats in the national legislature are subject to direct or indirect multiparty elections (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). However, such elections are either unfree or unfair or both (Schedler 2006; Howard and Roessler 2006:367) and governments systematically abuse their powers and insulate their position against political challengers by imposing disadvantages on opposition parties, curtailing

the development of civil society and the media, and suppressing political dissent. In case of the second type (“closed autocracies”), the chief executive and the legislature are either not subject to elections, or there is no de-facto competition in elections such as in one-party regimes. That is, electoral autocracies are nondemocratic political regimes in which there are regular elections with limited competition, whereas in closed autocracies, the electoral arena is closed for competitors of the ruling party, or there are no national popular elections at all.

### *Democratic Backsliding*

Finally, this study builds on Waldner and Lust’s definition of democratic backsliding as “a deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance, within any regime” (Waldner and Lust 2018:95). At the most general level, backslides are different from “autocratic reversals” (Haggard and Kaufman 2016) in that the decline in the quality of democracy is not required to coincide with regime change from (electoral or liberal) democracy to (electoral or closed) autocracy. Heuristically, we can think of democratic backsliding in the following way: Backslides are constituted by (a series of) signal events, such as restrictions on the freedom of the press or a removal of an incumbent by force, whose initiators can be either ruling elites, opposition politicians, the military or other actors with actual “veto power”. While instances of coups and executive aggrandisement can arguably only be the consequence of purposeful behaviour of the initiators, the same may not hold for reductions in democratic quality brought about by large-scale (ethnic) violence, political scandals or the intervention of international actors.

### *Conceptualizing a Potential Radicalisation-Democracy Nexus*

As Axel P. Schmid (2013:1) notes, “the causes of radicalization are as diverse as they are abundant”. Much of the literature has focused on the micro-level of individual radicalisation. Such a narrow approach, however, deflects attention from the role of a wider spectrum of factors at the meso-level of the relevant radical milieu or network as the “space where micro-dynamics of radicalization take place” (della Porta 2018:4645) as well as the macro-level of the domestic and international political and socio-economic context. At the macro-level, potential explanatory factors include

the perceived closing of political opportunities as a result of repressive policies or cooptation strategies of governments; the polarisation of public opinion and party politics and the formation of counter-movements; tense minority-majority relations in a society; and missing socioeconomic opportunities for whole sectors of a society which can lead to de-legitimation of an existing order (Schmid 2013; Neumann, 2013; Süß and Aakhunzaada 2019).

### *Democracy and Terrorism*

While a comprehensive analysis of radicalisation in Southeast Asia would have to take into account conditions for as well as dynamics of radicalisation that leads to political violence in general and to terrorism in particular, at all three levels of analysis, the aim of this paper is more modest. Its focus is on the relationship between radicalisation and terrorism on the one hand and democracy on the other. While most conflict scholars analyse how democracy affects international and, importantly, domestic terrorism, which is the far more common type, an emerging literature in comparative politics has turned its attention to the question of how terrorism affects democracy and, especially, democratic decay. With regard to the first strand, that is the impact of type of political regime on the occurrence of terrorist groups and the probability of terrorist incidents, there are two theoretical arguments, which posit opposite expectations (cf. Li 2005; Chenoweth, 2013; Gaibullov, Piazza, and Sandler 2017; Magen 2018). A first, dominant view until the late 1990s, posit that democracy encourages terrorism because more open and more liberal democratic regimes are more attractive targets for terrorists compared to less open and more repressive regimes (Eubank and Weinberg 1994, 2006). Since the early 2000s, a second, opposing view, has emerged. It argues that democracy reduces the risk for radicalisation and domestic or transnational terrorism, because democracy is a “method of nonviolence” (Rummel 1997): the openness of the democratic process and democratic rules of nonviolent conflict resolution incentivise groups in democratic societies to pursue nonviolent alternatives rather than costly terrorist activities to further their interest (Eyerman 1998; Abadie 2006).

*Radicalisation into Terrorism and Democratic Backsliding*

Academic works in the second strand of research are of a more recent origin. Building on the developing literature of democratic recession, decay, erosion or backsliding, some scholars focus on potential direct or indirect effects of terrorism on the democratic quality of political regimes. Assuming that in a polarised political environment not only non-state actors, but also the state can radicalise, scholars such as Azis Huq (2018) posit that the occurrence of terrorism within a polity can have corrosive effects on the democratic politics of that polity. There are at least three causal paths through which political radicalisation into terrorism might conduce to the democratic recession (Huq 2018). In the first two mechanisms, terrorism has a direct and immediate effect on the quality of democracy, while the third mechanism is more indirect.

First, an increase in terrorist attacks – especially when they are linked to a greater lethality and perceived by citizens as an immediate and massive threat to their individual security – creates a “window of opportunity” for so-called “executive aggrandizement” (Bermeo 2016). This causal path is most closely aligned with the weakening of judicial and legislative constraints on the executive, which constitute horizontal accountability (*accountability dimension*).

Second, the threat of terrorist attacks and fear of terrorism (let alone actual attacks) among democratic publics give governments incentives to weaken civil liberties and make it easier for authorities to intrude into private spheres (Magen 2018:122). This is especially the case when counter-radicalisation policies and strategies of terrorism prevention involve the introduction of new powers to surveil, investigate and detain people, a weakening of rule-of-law guarantees of the rights of physical integrity (i.e. freedom from torture), and a reconfiguration of the state’s repressive capabilities. The later may specifically target civil liberties, including freedom of expression, association (especially religious organisations) and freedom from internet censorship. This second causal path is most closely aligned with freedom of expression and association, the existence of alternative sources of information, deliberation and civil liberties (*rights and freedoms dimension*).

The third causal pathway between terrorism and democratic decline concerns a more indirect effect of terrorism on democratic backsliding. Particularly during times of rising political radicalisation and deteriorating public order and security, democratic publics become vulnerable to a variety of manipulations by democratic leaders. The fear-generating, violent nature of terrorisms can be a driver of populist nationalism, authoritarian

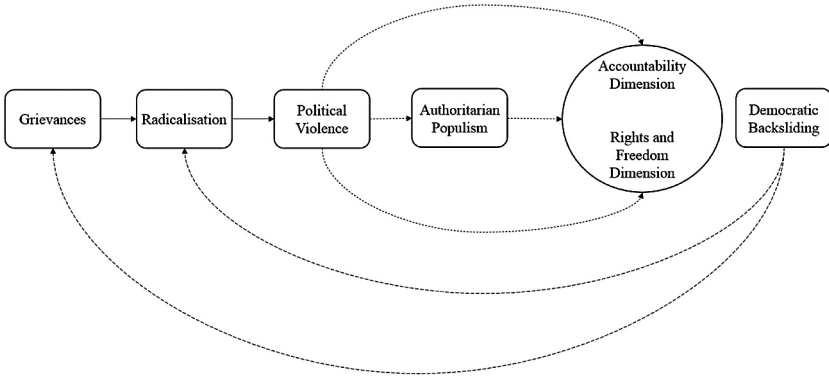
populism, and support for illiberal policies.<sup>1</sup> As Huq (2018:478) notes, the “eruption of terrorism, on this account, conduces to a new style of populist politics in the medium term. In turn, politicians selected by dint of their populist appeals tend to be averse to the main tenets of democracy.” This relationship can generate a medium-term dynamic that run concurrent to the process of anti-democratic institutional transformation discussed under the first and second mechanism (ibid.).

In fact, according to a recent study by Yasha Mounk and Jordan Kyle (2018), the backsliding of liberal democracy in many countries around the world is a consequence (at least to some extent) of the rise of authoritarian populist parties, leaders and governments. The two scholars built a global database of populism identifying 46 populist leaders or political parties that held executive office across 33 democratic countries between 1990 and 2018. They find that populists in government are about four times more likely than non-populist ones to harm democratic institutions. Particularly, populists frequently erode checks and balances on the executive: more than half of all populist leaders in the period 1990 to 2018 amended or rewrote their countries’ constitutions, and many of these changes extended term limits or weakened checks on executive power. Often, they aim to manipulate the rules of the electoral game in order to create an un-leveled playing field that disadvantages opposition parties and their candidates. The evidence also suggests that populists are prone to attack press freedom, civil liberties and political rights (ibid.).

---

1 In this chapter, I follow Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser’s conceptualisation of populism as “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017:6). There is a large variation among populist movements, leaders and their thin ideologies. The most common differentiation is the one between “left” (economic) and right (authoritarian or xenophobic) populism. One common key feature of authoritarian, nationalist and right of the center or far-right populisms around the globe is the law-and-order appeal, usually linked to some kind of framing of minorities and foreigners as the “dangerous other”.

Figure 1: *The Vicious Cycle of Radicalisation and Democratic Backsliding*



Source: the author.

Figure 1 summarises these considerations in the form of a process model. It is referred to in the following as the “vicious cycle of radicalization and democratic backsliding”. This model starts at the point where political radicalisation into (terrorist) violence takes place. Socioeconomic or political grievances triggered a process of individual radicalisation and an escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time. Terrorist incidents and/or fear of terrorist incidents is then countered by illiberal, repressive or anti-democratic measures (involving perhaps the rise of populist movements and leaders) which result in executive aggrandisement, repressive security policies and/or restrictions on the freedom of the press and internet media that cause democratic backsliding. This in turn initiates a negative feedback loop or a kind of slippery slope process, which increases grievances and contributes to further radicalisation.

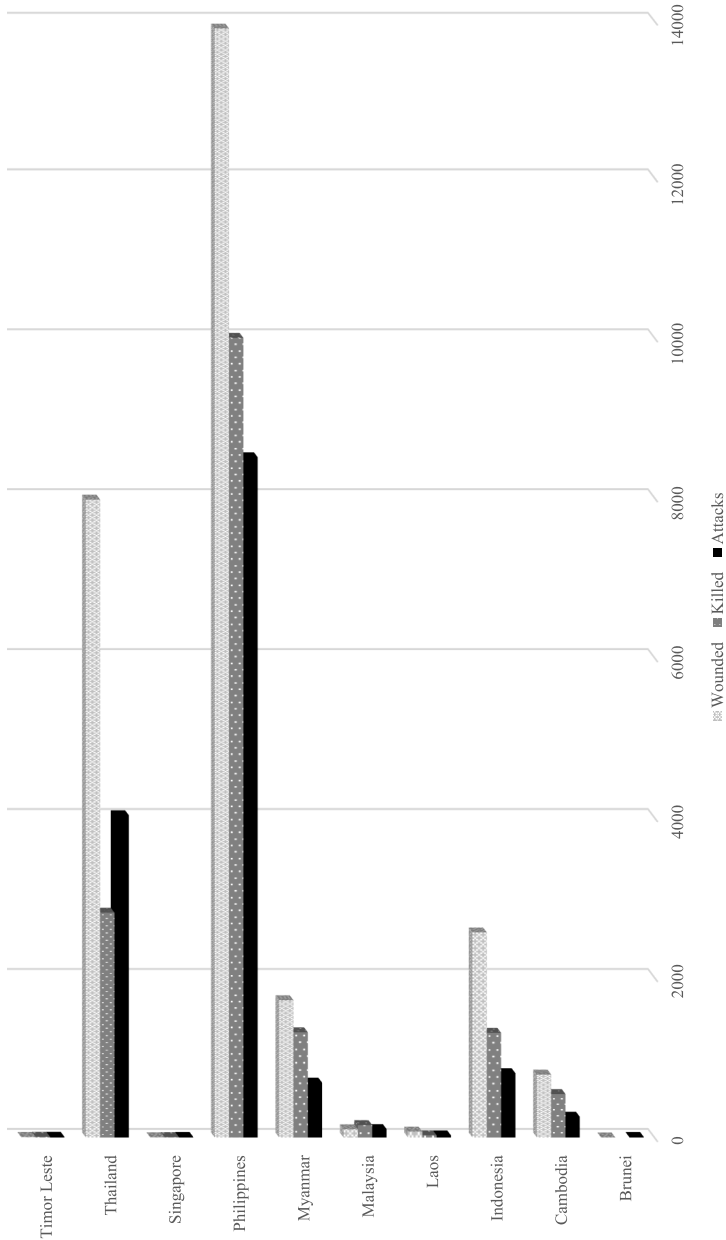
### *Radicalisation, Terrorism and Democracy in Southeast Asia*

Southeast Asia has a tragic history of political radicalisation and long before the rise of Islamic militancy, large areas of the region had been hotspots of terrorism, insurgency or other forms of political violence. Although most groups involved in the numerous ethno-nationalist or ideology-driven conflicts in Southeast Asia do not meet the standard definitions of terrorism, these violent conflicts have contributed to the rise of terrorist groups in recent years in two ways. First, some Islamist terrorist organisa-



tions such as the Philippine Abu Sayyaf Group evolved out of an ongoing, armed conflict. Secondly, the shifting kaleidoscope of conflicts and their socioeconomic and political consequences create the appropriate operational environment for local and transnational terrorist groups (Croissant and Barlow 2007). Even though radicalisation in individual countries has consequences for the entire region and beyond, a closer glance at the data show that terrorism is concentrated in a small number of Southeast Asian nations: the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand (especially the three southernmost provinces) and, since 2010, Myanmar (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Hotspots of Terrorism in Southeast Asia, 1970-2018



Source: the author based on data from START (2019).

Research on conflict and terrorism in Southeast Asia has noted that most of the terrorist organisations traditionally operating in the regional theatre were local in nature and well entrenched in their social, political and economic environment, including major Islamist terrorist organisations such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). Meanwhile, analysts see a shift in what is driving Islamist attacks in Southeast Asia. Where they often used to be triggered by local factors, fighters are now inspired by events in the Middle East, i.e. Syria and Iraq (CRS 2017). Members of al Qaeda-linked groups such as JI and Jamaah Ansaryusy Syariah (JAS) have become more dormant in recent years, but these groups still pose a threat (Taufiqurrohman et al. 2018; Nahdohdin et al. 2019). In contrast, IS-friendly groups, smaller cells and radicalised individuals have become increasingly threatening in the region since the mid-2010s. These include especially active groups such as the Jamaah Ansharud Daulah which is the largest Indonesian pro-Islamic State (IS) entity; another Indonesian pro-IS group, Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah, and the Lion of Allah. Similarly, the terrorist threat landscape of the Southern Philippines is also dominated by IS-linked groups, which includes the Maute Group or IS-Lanao (the Filipino state's main opponent in the siege of Marawi), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the ASG. While mainly recruiting locals, Islamist radical groups in the southern Philippines also attracts foreign fighters from Malaysia and Indonesia as well as non-Malays from Northern Africa and South Asia (ibid.; Chalk 2016).

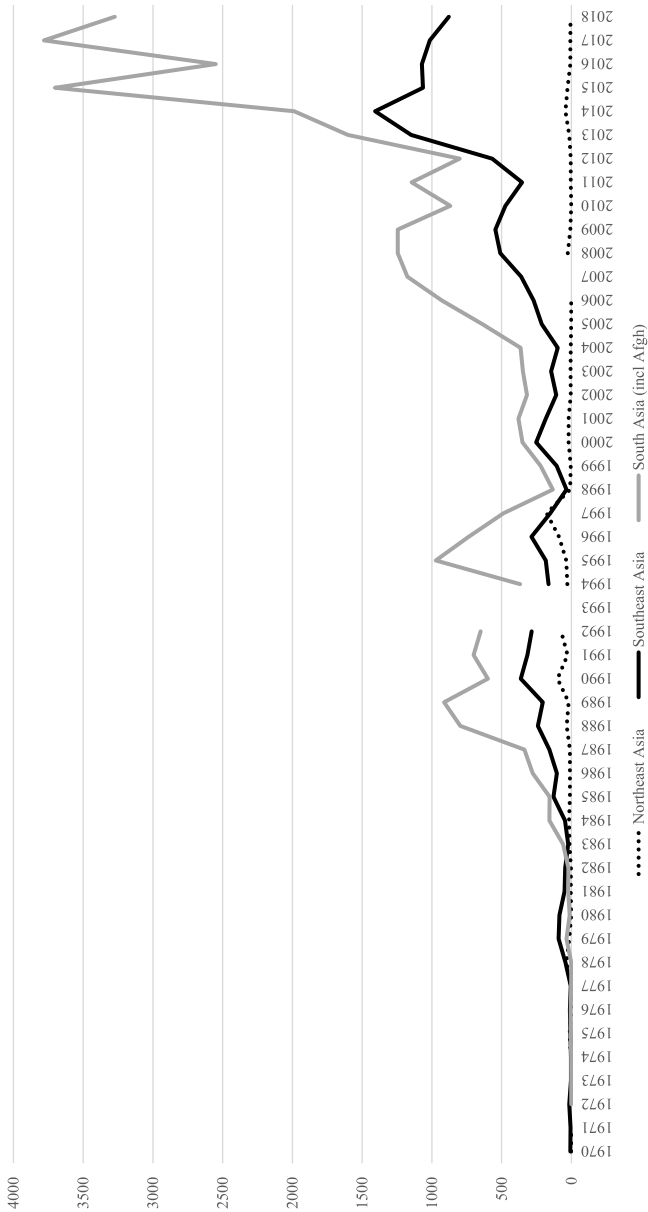
Malaysia also faces both homegrown and external terrorist threats (Nahdohdin et al. 2019). Local radicals include Malaysian nationals and returning fighters who have travelled to Iraq, Syria, and the Philippines and an increasing number of radicalised youth and women. Foreign terrorist fighters enter Malaysia especially from Indonesia and the Philippines, but also from the Middle East and South Asia (Barrett 2017).

Even in Myanmar, not previously known for Islamist radicalisation, militant groups may be forming. Particularly the persecution of the Rohingya and the refugee crisis, which has played out along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, has brought a spike in transnational criminal and terrorist activities in recent years: almost fifty per cent of all terrorist attacks (and an even higher share of fatalities) shown in Figure 2 took place in the 2010s. Related to this, transnational groups such as IS and, especially, al Qaeda, are making attempts at recruiting Rohingya refugees (Nahdohdin et al. 2019). However, it is important to mention that radical Buddhist nationalists throughout Myanmar have instrumentalised the Rohingya issue to promote their exclusivist agenda (International Crisis Group 2018). Finally, the century-old conflict between the Kingdom of Thailand and Mus-

lim-Malay separatists in the southern provinces of Thailand, which resurged since 2004, is ongoing. The organisation that controls the majority of the militants in Southern Thailand is Barisan Revolusi Nasional, though Malay militant groups in Southern Thailand have shown limited interest in forming links with other Islamist terrorist groups in Southeast Asia or beyond.

What is the relationship between regime type and terrorism in Southeast Asia and how does this possibly differ from patterns in other regions of the world? Answers to these questions can be found in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), a systematic, open-source database managed by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) that includes more than 190,000 terrorist incidents and casualties globally in the period 1970 to 2018 (START 2019). Building upon the V-Dem project's typology of four different regime types, described above, we can apply the GTD data to each regime category for the years 1970 to 2018. The GTD figures reveal an enormous increase in the number of terrorist attacks globally and regionally over the years. A glance at the Pacific Asia shows an increase in terrorist attacks by 1,111 per cent, going from 432 attacks in 2002 to 4,803 in 2017. This corresponds roughly to the global increase rate in terrorism in the same period. However, as Figure 3 shows, South Asia is the main terrorism threat theatre in Asia, whereas Northeast Asia now plays hardly any role in regional and global terrorism. The number of terrorist attacks has also increased significantly in Southeast Asia, from 109 incidents in 2002 to 1,407 in 2014 and 895 in 2018. Similar to South Asia, a decline was evident after an initial peak around 2008. From 2012 onwards, terrorism in Southeast Asia has increased again, similar to that in South Asia (and worldwide). Between 2016 and 2017 alone, Southeast Asia saw a 36 per cent increase in the number of deaths caused by terrorism; in 2017 alone, jihadist groups supporting separatist and insurgent causes committed 348 terrorist acts, killing 292 people (START 2019). As has been shown, this development is mainly concentrated on three or four countries.

Figure 3: Terrorist Incidents in Asia-Pacific, 1970-2018



Source: the author based on data from START (2019).

The number of terrorist events globally and in Asia-Pacific, moreover, rose across all regime types but the increase has been the most pronounced in the intermediate regime categories of electoral autocracies and electoral democracies. In contrast to the 1970s and 1980s, when some wealthy and advanced OECD-democracies such as the United Kingdom, the United States, West Germany, Israel, Italy and Japan, suffered from high levels of chronic terrorism, there has been a remarkable shift since the 1990s. Although the data presented in the following Table 1 seem to provide preliminary evidence that since 9/11, terrorism persists mainly in the middle range of regimes between unanimously autocratic and liberal democratic rule, it is increasingly prevalent also in closed autocracies. The overall pattern for Asia-Pacific is similar to the global trend, whereas GTD figures for Southeast Asia demonstrate that electoral democracies are by far the most terrorism prone political regimes in the early twenty-first century.

Table 1: *Terrorist Incidents Around the World, 1970 to 2018*

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2018
<b>World</b>					
Closed autocracies	61	965	356	241	1680
Electoral autocracies	61	954	903	439	4610
Electoral democracies	15	117	1926	688	2950
Liberal democracies	525	678	686	209	380
<b>Asia-Pacific</b>					
Closed autocracies	1	3	16	62	183
Electoral autocracies	8	85	127	31	556
Electoral democracies	0	10	823	504	1639
Liberal democracies	1	0	92	13	5
<b>Southeast Asia</b>					
Closed autocracies	8	1	11	8	182
Electoral autocracies		84	18	10	43
Electoral democracies	0	0	33	235	654
Liberal democracies	0	0	0	0	0

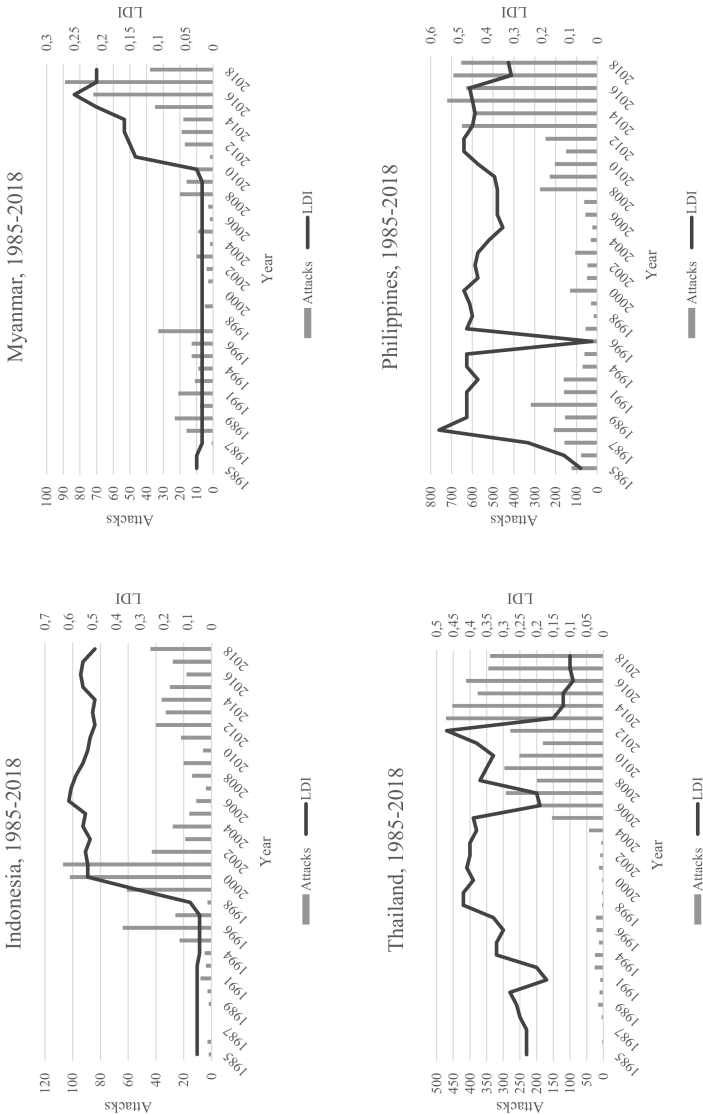
Source: the author based on data from V-Dem (2019) and START (2019).

*A Vicious Cycle of Radicalisation and Democratic Backsliding?*

Does the correlation between radicalisation, terrorism, and the quality of democracy also indicate a causal connection? Is it possible to find empirical evidence for a vicious circle of radicalisation and democratic recession in South East Asia? Numerous recent studies on national and transnational counter-terrorism policies point to national-level and ASEAN-level weaknesses (see Tan and Nasu 2016; Borelli 2017). Despite significant variance in the counterterrorism campaigns of individual countries, which produced different outcomes over time (Febrica 2010), it might be an accurate summary to conclude that governments in Southeast Asia have often adopted policies that are fuelling militancy by restricting freedoms and fostering authoritarianism.

Focusing in a more systematic fashion on the four most terrorism-prone countries in the region, the following Figure 4 provides preliminary evidence that the cycle of terrorist activities is linked to the trajectories of political liberalisation and democratic backsliding in Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines. The four countries experienced different forms of autocratisation or democratic recession in recent years.

Figure 4: Trajectories of Terrorism and Democratic Quality in Four Southeast Asian Nations, 1985 to 2018



Note: LDI is V-Dem’s Liberal Democracy Index. In addition to electoral democracy, it takes into account legislative constraints on the executive, judicial constraints on the executive, and respect for civil liberties. Source: the author based on data from V-Dem (2019) and START (2019).



*Indonesia*

Indonesia seemed to be an exception as the maturation of the nation's democratic institutions seemed to have allowed many groups to seek recourse to their grievances through electoral politics, while empowering the Indonesian president to utilise his or her popular legitimacy to rally public opinion against militant networks, "undermining the appeal of militant groups to the broader public" (Kurlantzick 2016:227). However, it is also true that it was not until after the democratic reforms that violent Indonesian Islamic organisations started to emerge (Laskar Jihad in 1999, Islamic Defenders' Front in 2000, Jemaah Islamiyah in 2001). As Kivimäki argues, the organisation of terrorist groups required some democratic freedoms, or at least weakness of control in fragile states (Kivimäki 2007). The more liberal media environment, inter-party competition and the formation of new "identity coalitions" comprising religious, nongovernment, security, and party elites helped drive this development (Melchnik 2016). As Ziegenhain notes, all Islamic parties together have received only between 20 and 30 per cent of the votes in parliamentary elections since 1999 (Ziegenhain 2018). Despite their rather limited appeal with voters, Islamist actors have been fairly successfully in penetrating nationalist and secular, political parties. In recent years, Islamist organisations insisting that Islamic scripture is of higher value than the constitution, have been able to inject their view into the national mainstream, a development which to some analysts indicate the stealth Islamisation or radicalisation of the public (Assyaukanie 2016; for more detail, see Mietzner and Muhtdai 2018).

Even though democracy scholars praised Indonesia's democracy as healthy and stable, events since the election of President Joko Widodo, a.k.a. Jokowi (elected in 2014 and reelected in 2019) cast doubt upon this characterisation of Indonesia's democracy. According to Warburton and Aspinall (2019:256), "Indonesia is now in the midst of democratic regression." The presidential elections of 2014 and 2018 were marred by controversies and increasing political violence; defeated, populist challenger Prabowo Subianto initially declined to accept the results. Other symptoms of Indonesia's democracy malaise are an illiberal drift in the regulation of civil liberties and protection of human rights, and the government's manipulation of state. Adopting to socio-religious polarisation, as well as rising radicalisation and creeping Islamisation of the Indonesian society and political mainstream, the Widodo government, in turn, relies "on increasingly illiberal measures to contain the populist-Islamist alliance, undermining some of Indonesia's democratic achievements in the process" (Aspinall and Mietzner 2019:104).

*Thailand*

Thailand suffered from the most dramatic democratic reversal. Following the parliamentary election of January 2001, the Kingdom entered almost two decades of political turmoil, including two military coups in eight years (Croissant and Lorenz 2018). The gradual weakening of rights, freedoms and accountability mechanism by the Thaksin administration, from 2001 to 2006, led to a constitutional crisis and a military coup in September 2006. Following a military-led interim government, Thailand returned to some form of elected civilian government in December 2007. As an outcome of the 2011 election, a pro-Thaksin government under PM Yingluck Shinawatra, sister of ex-PM Thaksin, was formed, which sought to change the constitution to strengthen the executive and legislative branches vis-à-vis non-elected veto powers. By December 2013, anti-Shinawatra protestors occupied parts of Bangkok. Snap elections were disrupted by protest groups and eventually invalidated by the Constitution Court. Army Chief Prayuth Chan-o-cha declared martial law on 20 May 2014, and, two days later announced a putsch. The Kingdom remained under direct military rule until early 2019.

The rise of Malay-Muslim radicalism in the southernmost provinces of Thailand since 2004 is clearly related to these developments and, perhaps, the most striking example of the relationship between incomplete democratisation, unresolved national identity problems and radicalisation into terrorism. The Malay-Muslim insurgency in the four southernmost province conflict had been described as “waning” in the 1990s, but reemerged when in 2004, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra tried to impose greater central control over a region traditionally dominated by his main opponent, the Democratic Party (Croissant 2005). From 2004, when the insurgency had intensified to late 2016, almost 7,000 people were killed and at least 12,000 were wounded due to violence in the region (International Crisis Group 2017).

While the concrete causes are still contested, some scholars pointing to competition between pro-Thaksin Royal Police and the pro-Royalist Thai military as an additional factor that provoked, shaped, or exacerbated the operations of the state authorities and security forces in Thailand’s “Deep South” since 2004 (Croissant 2005; McCargo 2008: chapter 3; Chambers 2015). The origins of this competition between the two main armed agents of the Thai state reach back into the 1940s and early 1950s. Although this intra-bureaucratic conflict had been dormant for decades, the executive aggrandisement by PM Thaksin in the 2000s and the struggle between pro-Thaksin forces and the “Network Monarchy” (McCargo 2005) over control

of Thailand's "Deep State" in the early 2010s rekindled the conflict (Merieau 2019).

Politically, rising Buddhist extremism and anti-Muslim sentiments in Thailand are reflected in changes in the new constitution of 2017, which vow to guard Buddhism 'against all forms of desecration' (Tonsakulrungruang 2018). These as well as other policy-related measures suggest that Thailand has been hit by a wave of Buddhist extremism currently sweeping across Myanmar and Cambodia, led by the Myanmar-based Ma Ba Tha movement (see below). This could further result in socio-cultural marginalisation and political radicalisation of Thailand's southern Malay-Muslim population. Similarly, the enforcement of Martial Law, Emergency Decrees and the Internal Security Act in the Southern conflict areas, which has led to an increase of human rights violations and arbitrary violations of civil liberties in security operations, could bolster the erosion of the legitimacy and trust of the security forces (Nahdohdin et al. 2019:26-27).

### *The Philippines*

The Philippines, despite having more experience with democratic institutions than any other country in Southeast Asia, is also no stranger to democratic backsliding. A first backsliding episode, from 2001 to 2006, saw the downfall of populist President Joseph "Erap" Estrada (1998-2001) and the rise of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (a.k.a. GMA) to the presidency (2001-2010). She was the Vice President to Estrada, who resigned under the threat of impeachment for corruption. President Arroyo herself faced down impeachment attempts motivated by charges of fraud in the 2004 presidential election, and she was accused of corruption as well. In 2006, she declared a state of emergency to prevent a rumoured coup attempt. Following the inauguration of President Rodrigo Duterte (elected 10 May 2016), the Philippines has entered a second, and perhaps more dramatic, democratic recession. Within weeks of his inauguration, the new president began his murderous war on drugs and ran roughshod over human rights, its political opponents, and the country's democratic institutions. The government weaponised the legal system to attack political opponents, disparaged or threatened the leaders of key accountability institutions, and threatened the mainstream media with lawsuits and nonrenewal of franchises.

Although Duterte, former mayor of Davao, the biggest city in the southern Philippines, has pledged to push through a peace deal, he has appoint-

ed to his cabinet many advisers distrusted by the southern insurgent groups (Kurlantzick 2016:231). The Philippines is the only Southeast Asian country which treated insurgency as terrorist threat and deals with it militarily, although Thailand also launched a military operation to deal with the southern insurgency, though it officially refrains from declaring it terrorism (Hafidz 2009). Different governments in Manila tried a mix of peace initiatives and harsh military-led security operations. Both strategies have yet to yield more durable results: peace initiatives of both the Arroyo administration and President Duterte collapsed due to complications in Manila politics. The Duterte administration has urged terrorists to surrender by promising safety for the asylum seekers and their families, albeit with mixed successes. The Philippines' inability to pass legislation designed to bring peace to the Muslim-majority southern provinces has only made it easier for the most extreme southern militants to keep fighting and foreign fighters have assessed the Philippines as an ideal location for their struggle.

### *Myanmar*

Finally, the case of Myanmar is different from the other countries, because the country experienced a process of political liberalisation and a transition from direct military rule to a democratically elected government in the period 2010 to 2015, without ever surpassing the minimum threshold of democracy. So far, electoral authoritarianism à la Burmese did not turn out to be a transitional stage on the road to electoral democracy. And yet, the country experienced substantial democratic erosion, at least relative to the already achieved level of democratic quality (see Figure 4). The V-Dem data reflect the fact that, as Chew and Easley (2019) describe, the introduction of institutions of electoral democracy, most importantly free elections, has “increased political space for aggressive ethno-nationalists”, for “sectarian violence” and “hate speech” as well as for crimes against humanity. The struggle for national identity and how ethnic minorities should be accommodated, has been a key challenge to state-builders since the inauguration of the union in 1948. It contributed to the rise and persistence of a “praetorian state,” in which the Burmese military (Tatmadaw) dominated politics, the economy, and society since 1962 (Croissant 2018). In spite of the installation of a democratically elected government in 2016, the official concept of the nation-state still revolves around Buddhism, the Burman language, and the Bamar ethnic group, which accounts for roughly two-thirds of the population. Many ethnic minorities do not support this concept or even

reject it openly and have been fighting for the acknowledgment of their ethno-cultural identities for decades (for more detail, see Jones 2014). The transition from military rule to a civilian government unleashed dangerous majoritarian tendencies and anti-Muslim attacks, described by many international critics as attempted genocide. Especially since 2016, there has been growing mobilisation by ultra-nationalist Buddhist groups, such as the Patriotic Association of Myanmar (Ma Ba Tha) against the Rohingya (International Crisis Group 2018). Undoubtedly, political liberalisation since the end of military rule has allowed extremist groups to gain traction with their anti-Muslim platform. The case supports the hypothesis that political liberalisation and democratisation empower ethno-nationalist movements, religious extremism, and political entrepreneurs of ethnic violence.

### *Conclusions*

The experiences of Southeast Asian societies suggest that radicalisation and terrorism do not only take place within the framework of newly established democratic institutions and procedures, but the ups and downs of terrorism cycles is closely related to trajectories of uneven liberalisation and democratisation. As shown in Figure 4, initially, political liberalisation and the increase in democratic quality led to greater radicalisation and frequency of terrorist violence, followed by its temporary decline.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, democracies with lower levels of legitimacy, poorer human rights practices, intermediate levels of political development, and unresolved conflict among ethnic, sectarian or political groups experience the most terrorism in Southeast Asia. In contrast, closed autocracies such as Vietnam, Laos, Brunei, but also electoral autocracies in Cambodia and Singapore, were able to escape the “vicious cycle of repression and radicalization” that is typical for authoritarian regimes (Storm 2009).

Even though conclusions must be tentative, it seems fair to conclude that the implementation of democratic procedures and practices in Southeast Asia has had an impact on the management of national identity problems. At the same time, the outcomes of democratisation processes in terms of the levels and quality of democracy have also been affected by issues (or problems) of national identity. Of course, it is true that the exis-

---

2 The exception among the recently democratised Southeast Asian nations is Timor Leste which has also the most democratic political system in the region and which did not experience so far a pronounced process of democratic backsliding.

tence of ethnic or cultural minorities who do not feel they belong to the national community pose a problem for the quality and stability of new democracies. Democratisation, in fact, encouraged the political mobilisation of ethnic and national identities among groups competing for power. At the same time, however, the opening of new liberal spaces in several Southeast Asian countries created a window of opportunity for the formation of new identity coalitions, often involving more radicalised, religious individuals and groups. While there is little empirical evidence to assume that the recent revival of political radicalism, religious extremism and Islamist (or Buddhist, for that matter) terrorism in Southeast Asia is primarily a consequent of democratic regime change, anecdotal evidence seems to justify the conclusion that incomplete transitions to a consolidated, liberal democratic regime have rekindled political radicalism. Weak political institutions and problems of national identity alter the incentives and opportunities of political actors, who may evoke extremist sentiments for political purposes. Even though the region is much more democratic now than it was just 30 years ago, democratic backsliding in the past ten years or so has contributed via the mechanisms of the radicalisation-backsliding cycle to further problems of radicalisation – especially in Thailand and Myanmar, but also in the Philippines and, albeit to a lesser extent, in Indonesia. However, it seems also evident that policy-related conclusions should not aim at further weakening of democratic qualities of the polities in the region, but on stopping and reversing democratic backsliding – not only as a tool to strengthen democracy, but also as a means to counter radicalisation. Yet, to effectively counter both the communist and Islamist insurgent threats in a deeply ingrained conflict such as the one in the Southern Philippines, attempts to address insurgency in the country must begin with socio-economic integration. As such, creating economic opportunities for the youth in Southern Philippines is key and can be achieved through vocational training and other similar initiatives. Finally, a viable solution is inextricably linked to Myanmar's domestic political situation. There is a dire need to counter the ultra-nationalist and extremist rhetoric from radical Buddhist elements, which continues to fuel and aggravate violence and discrimination against the Rohingya. However, as long as the Burmese military insists on defending its political power by fomenting nationalism and ethnic hatred against democratic demands from civilian actors, this would be highly unlikely.

*References*

- Abadie, A. 2006. "Poverty, political freedom, and the roots of terrorism". *American Economic Review* 96: 50–56.
- Abuza, Z. and C. Clarke. 2019. "The Islamic State Meets Southeast Asia. ISIS Seeks New Outposts Across the Indian Ocean". *Foreign Affairs*, 16 September 2019. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/southeast-asia/2019-09-16/islamic-state-meets-southeast-asia>).
- Aspinall, E. and M. Mietzner. 2019. "Southeast Asia's Troubling Elections: Non-democratic Pluralism in Indonesia". *Journal of Democracy*, 30(4): 104-118.
- Assyaukanie, L. 2017. "Unholy alliance: Ultra-conservatism and political pragmatism in Indonesia". *Thinking ASEAN*, 19.
- Barrett, R. 2017. *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*. The Soufan Center, 2017. (<http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017.pdf>).
- Bermeo, N. 2016. "On Democratic Backsliding". *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1): 5-19.
- Borelli, M. 2017. "ASEAN Counter-Terrorism Weaknesses". *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 9(9): 14-20.
- Chalk, P. 2016. "The Islamic State in the Philippines: A Looming Shadow in Southeast Asia". *CTS Sentinel*, 9(3). (<https://ctc.usma.edu/the-islamic-state-in-the-philippines-a-looming-shadow-in-southeast-asia/>).
- Chambers, P.W. 2015. "Civil-Military Relations in Thailand since the 2014 Coup: The Tragedy of Security Sector 'Deform'". *PRIF Report # 138*. Frankfurt am Main: PRIF.
- Chenoweth, E. 2013. "Terrorism and Democracy". *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16: 355-378.
- Chow, J. and L.-E. Easley. 2019. "Myanmar's Democratic Backsliding in the Struggle for National Identity and Independence". *The Asan Forum*, June 25, Special Forum. (<http://www.theasanforum.org/myanmars-democratic-backsliding-in-the-struggle-for-national-identity-and-independence/>).
- Congressional Research Service (CRS). 2017. *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service.
- Coxhead, I. 2018. "Introduction: Southeast Asia's long transition". In: Coxhead, I., ed. *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Economics*, pp: 3-22. London and New York: Routledge.
- Croissant, A. 2005. "Unrest in South Thailand: Contours, Causes, and Consequences Since 2001". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 27(1): 21-44.
- Croissant, A. 2018. *Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Croissant, A. 2019. *Beating Backsliding? Episodes and Outcomes of Democratic Backsliding in Asia-Pacific in the Period 1950 to 2018*. Paper presented at the workshop "Democratic Backsliding in Asia", Heidelberg, 7-9 December, 2019.



- Croissant, A. and D. Barlow. 2007. "Following the Money Trail: Terrorist Financing and Government Responses in Southeast Asia". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30(2): 131-157.
- Croissant, A. and M. Bunte, ed. 2012. *The Crisis of Democratic Governance in Southeast Asia*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave.
- Croissant, A. and W. Merkel. 2019. "Defective Democracy". In: Kollmorgen, R.; Merkel, W. and Wagener, H.-J., ed. *Handbook of Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, pp: 437-446. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dahl, R.A. 1971. *Polyarchy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- della Porta, D. 2018. "Radicalization: A Relational Perspective". *Annual Review of Political Science*, 21: 461-474.
- Dragolov, Georgi; Koch, Michael and Larsen, Mandi. 2018. "Macro-level Determinants and Consequences of Social Cohesion in Asia". In: Bertelsmann Stiftung, ed. *What Holds Asian Societies Together? Insights from the Social Cohesion Radar*, pp: 97-138. Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- Eubank, W.L. and Weinberg, L. 1994. "Does democracy encourage terrorism?". *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 6(4): 417-463.
- Eubank, W.L. and Weinberg, L. 2006. "Does Democracy Encourage Terrorism?". In: Hoffman, B., ed. *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Eyerman J. 1998. "Terrorism and Democratic States: Soft Targets or Accessible Systems". *International Interactions*, 24(2): 151-170.
- Gaibullov, K.; Piazza, J.A. and Sandler, T. 2017. "Regime Types and Terrorism". *International Organization*, 71 (Summer): 491-522.
- Gaspar, J.A.; C. Daase; N. Deitelhoff; Junk J. and Sold, M. 2018. "Was ist Radikalisierung? Präzisierungen eines umstrittenen Begriffs". *PRIF Report 5/2018*. Frankfurt am Main: HSFK.
- Hafidz, T.S. 2009. "A Long Row to Hoe: A Critical Assessment of ASEAN Cooperation on Counter- Terrorism". *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, 11 (December 2009). (<https://kyotoreview.org/issue-11/a-long-row-to-hoe-a-critical-assessment-of-asean-cooperation-on-counter-terrorism/>).
- Haggard, S. and Kaufman, R.R. 2016. *Dictators and Democrats: Masses, Elites, and Regime Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Howard, M. M., and Roessler, P.G. 2006. "Liberalizing electoral outcomes in competitive authoritarian regimes". *American Journal of Political Science*, 50: 365-381.
- Huq, A. 2018. "Terrorism and Democratic Recession". *The University of Chicago Law Review* 85(2): 457-484. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26455914>).
- International Crisis Group. 2017. *Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace*. Report No. 291. Brussels: ICG.
- International Crisis Group. 2018. *The Long Haul Ahead for Myanmar's Rohingya Refugee Crisis*. Report No. 296, Brussels: ICG. (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/296-long-haul-ahead-myanmar-rohingya-refugee-crisis>).
- Jones, Lee. 2014. "Explaining Myanmar's regime transition: the periphery is central". *Democratization*, 21(5): 780-802.



- Kundani, A. 2012. "Radicalisation: the journey of a concept". *Race Class*, 54(2): 3–25.
- Kurlantzick, J. 2016. "Democratic Backsliding and the Reach of ISIS in Southeast Asia". *Current History*, September: 26-32.
- Kyle, J. and Y. Mounk. 2018. "The Populist Harm to Democracy: An Empirical Assessment". (<https://institute.global/insight/renewing-centre/populist-harm-democracy>).
- Li, Q. 2005. "Does Democracy Promote or Reduce Transnational Terrorist Incidents?". *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 49 (April): 278–297.
- Lührmann, A.; Tannenberg, M. and Lindberg, S.I. 2018. "Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes". *Politics and Governance*, 6(1).
- Magen, A. 2018. "Fighting Terrorism: The Democracy Advantage". *Journal of Democracy*, 29(1): 111-125.
- Malthaner S. 2011. *Mobilizing the Faithful. Militant Islamist Groups and Their Constituencies*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
- McCargo, D. 2005. "Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand". *The Pacific Review*, 18(4): 499–519.
- McCargo, D. 2008. *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Melchnik, J. 2016. *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Merieau, E. 2019. *Police vs Military in Contemporary Thailand*. Paper presented at the Conference "Armed Forces, the State, and Society in Southeast Asia: Identity, Authority, Legitimacy, Legacy". 6 December 2019. New York City: New York University.
- Merkel, W. 2004. "Embedded and Defective Democracies". *Democratization*, 11(5): 33–58.
- Mietzner, M. and B. Muhtadi. 2018. "Explaining the 2016 Islamist Mobilisation in Indonesia: Religious Intolerance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Accommodation". *Asian Studies Review* 42(3): 479-497.
- Mudde, C. and Rovira Kaltwasser, C. 2017. *Populism. A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nahdohdin, M.; Angelianawati, D.; Prasetya, A. Putra; Yaoren, K. Yeo; Dhanaraj, J.; Bashar, I.; See, S. and Nasir, A. Abdul. 2019. "Southeast Asia". *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 11(1): 6-32.
- National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). 2019. "The Global Terrorism Database". College Park, MD: START. (<http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>).
- Neumann, P. 2013. "The trouble with radicalization." *National Affairs* 89(4): 873–893.
- Rummel, R. J. (1997). *Power Kills: Democracy as a Method of Nonviolence*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

- Schedler, A., ed. 2006. *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publisher.
- Schmid, A.P. 2013. *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*. The Hague: ICCT Research Paper March 2013.
- Storm, L. 2009. "The Persistence of Authoritarianism as a Source of Radicalization in North Africa". *International Affairs*, 85(5): 997-1013.
- Süß, C.A. and Aakhunzaada, A.N. 2019. "The Socioeconomic Dimension of Islamist Radicalization in Egypt and Tunisia". *PRIF/HFSK Working Papers* 45, 2019. Frankfurt a.M.: HFSK.
- Tan, S.S. and Nasu, H. 2016. "ASEAN and the development of counter-terrorism law and policy in Southeast Asia". *UNSW Law Journal*, Vol. 39 No.3 (2016): 1219-1238.
- Taufiqurrohman, M.; Habulan, A.; Bin Jani, M.H.; Bashar, I.; Zhi'An, F. and Yasin, A.M. 2018. "Southeast Asia". *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 10(1): 7-30.
- Tigno, J.V. 2018. "The Philippines in 2017. Popularity Breeds Contempt". *Asian Survey*, 58(1): 142-148.
- Tonsakulrungruang, K. 2018. "Thailand's Constitution Capitulates of Buddhist Domineering". *East Asia Forum*, January 24, 2018. (<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/01/24/thailands-constitutioncapitulates-to-buddhist-domineering/>).
- Waldner, D. and Lust, E. 2018. "Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding". *Annual Review of Political Science*, 21: 93-113.
- Warburton, E. and Aspinall, E. 2019. "Explaining Indonesia's Democratic Regression: Structure, Agency and Popular Opinion". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 41(2): 255-285.
- Zakaria, F. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy". *Foreign Affairs*, 76(6): 22-43.
- Ziegenhain, P. 2018. "Islam and Nation-Building in Indonesia and Malaysia". *ASIEN* 146: 78-95.

# Chapter II

## Region and Radicalisation



# Contention, Escalation and Cycles of Vengeance: Reflections on the Global Threat Landscape

*Roban Gunaratna*<sup>1</sup>

## *Introduction*

Today, the radicalisation of communities along religious lines presents a significant threat not only to the security, but also to the very stability of nations all over the world. Politicians' and political parties' use of religion in politics for the sole sake of advancing their personal and political agendas is driving communal polarisation forward and often leads to the enmity between members of different religious communities within one national society (Fenwick 2016). Terrorist, extremist and exclusivist groups then can easily prey in such aroused communities, recruit and grow, and thus become the major beneficiaries of societal conflict. But also globally, the rifts between communities, furthered by the narratives and propaganda activities of terrorist, extremist and exclusivist groups, increasingly lead to the spread of violence.

A review of threats in the years 2019 and 2020 thereby demonstrates four major developments with regard to violent terrorist organisations and movements. First, the contention between Islamic State (IS) and al Qaeda, including its affiliates, and second, the subsequent reformulation of these organisations' strategies, make the spread of violence beyond the current threat theatres more likely.<sup>2</sup> Third is the rise of Extreme Right Wing (XRW) in the West (Grierson 2019) as a result of two decades of global Islamist terrorism by al Qaeda and IS. And forth come the impact of a renewed escalation of the United States of America (USA) and Iran and the further escalation of violence in the region in the course of their contention on the one hand, and on the violence between Sunni and Shia groups, including the IS, on the other hand.

---

1 I would like to thank Dr. La Toya Waha for inviting me to write this article, as well as Kenneth Yeo Yaoren from the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) and Clifford Gere from RSIS for reviewing the article.

2 Gunaratna. Straits Times, 1 January 2019.

By outlining the current global threat landscape, the paper argues that the contention between organisations as well as cycles of vengeance increase the likelihood for radicalisation and violence.

*Contention between Rising Al Qaeda and Expanding IS – New Waves of Violence ahead?*

In its major realm of action, in Iraq and Syria, IS suffered a series of battlefield defeats. These have culminated in the loss of control over wide parts of IS territory. The last IS stronghold Baghuz was lost on 23 March 2019.<sup>3</sup> It was lost to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which were assisted by an American-led coalition's airstrikes, artillery, and special forces personnel. With the depletion of the IS ranks and decapitation of its top leadership, the IS was severely weakened.

This has allowed al Qaeda-affiliated groups to take over and eclipse IS in this area. Instead of IS, today, it is an al Qaeda affiliate, Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), which has developed into the major militant group fighting against the Assad regime.<sup>4</sup> And while IS remnants continue to attack Iraqi and Syrian forces, the bulk of the attacks are taken out by the al Qaeda-aligned groups. While the fights with IS reduced, the violence between the Assad regime, supported by the Russian forces and Iranian backed Shia militias, and its opponents will be sustained, only now as part of the fight against an al Qaeda-aligned coalition.

Even more, al Qaeda, as the precursor to of IS, holds an ideology which is not significantly different from that of IS as both seek to create a global caliphate (Glenn 2015). This might further incentivise former IS-supporters to change sides to al Qaeda, currently more successful and on the rise. Despite al Qaeda suffered some blows, too – Hamza, Osama Bin Laden's son, groomed for al Qaeda leadership, was killed in Afghanistan in 2019 – al Qaeda will continue to compete, and complement, IS in its fight for territorial control.<sup>5</sup> Much more strategic than IS, however, al Qaeda will eventually threaten governments beyond the conflict zones of Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia.

As a result of its defeats and the contention with al Qaeda, IS's strategy changed from concentrating recruits in Syria and Iraq to expanding net-

---

3 McKernan. The Guardian, 23 March 2019.

4 Tsurkov. NYR Daily, 27 November 2019.

5 Pengelly. The Guardian, 14 September 2019.

works and attacks globally. While IS's core in Iraq and Syria has less than 5,000 active fighters and another assumed 10,000 sleepers, an unknown number of members and fighters' family members are in custody in three dozen detention facilities (US Department of Defense 2019:2). This includes 2,000 to 3,000 Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) from about 30 countries held by Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and an unknown number in Iraqi and Syrian facilities. In addition to likely prison breaks, as an earlier part of its strategy, IS external operations wing is supporting their escape by bribing officials and is facilitating their return to third countries by providing funds, identity and travel documents, passage and safe haven.

As IS's branches command tens of thousands of fighters, IS's strategy is not to invite recruits any longer to Iraq and Syria. Instead, IS seeks to keep them in their homelands or sending countries for them to conduct attacks there (Pokalova 2019), or to travel to yet another theatre and fight in this third country. The extent of this strategy becomes clearer by looking at where IS has established its *wilayat* or external provinces. Located in IS *wilayat*, IS fighters live in Libya (Wilayah Barqah, Wilayah Tarabulus, and Wilayah Fizan), Algeria (Wilayah al-Jazair), Egypt (Wilayah Sinai), Yemen (Wilayah al-Yaman), and Saudi Arabia (Wilayah al-Haramayn), Afghanistan-Pakistan (Wilayah Khorasan), Northern Nigeria (Wilayah Gharb Afriqiyah), and the North Caucasus (Wilayah al-Qawqaz), East Asia (Wilayah Sharq Asia) and Central Africa (Wilayah Al-Afriqiyah Al-Wustaa) (Zelin 2020).<sup>6</sup>

Thus, since the territorial defeat in Syria in March 2019, the IS come-back-strategy has been to decentralise, recuperate and regroup. Following this strategic change, Turkey, as the gateway to Syria and Iraq, was declared a province (Wilayat Turkey) in April 2019 (Postings 2019). Moreover, Azerbaijan was declared a province in July 2019. Focusing on its eastward expansion, especially into South Asia, IS furthermore appointed an Emir, Abu Muhammed al-Bengali, for Bangladesh in April 2019. After a series of attacks in South Asia, IS declared provinces in Sri Lanka (Wilayah as Seylani)<sup>7</sup> in April 2019, India (Wilayah al-Hind) in May 2019, and Pakistan (Wilayah Pakistan), also in May 2019.

---

6 Plebani. ITsTime, 7 January 2019.

7 An in-depth examination of the declaration of wilayah in Sri Lanka reveals that Wilayah As Seylani was not declared by IS central or IS Sri Lanka, but instead announced by the Sri Lankan government based on a false claim by a captured terrorist leader. However, today, the term "Wilayah As Seylani" is used in government and other publications. See "MENAFN (2019).

To avenge its losses in Iraq and Syria, IS is now directing and inspiring attacks not only against countries, which were part of the anti-IS coalition. It is increasingly targeting Westerners and non-Muslims more generally. A particular target of IS and groups relating to it are now Christians in particular. With attacks against non-Muslims, Westerners and Christians all over, the IS has enabled a first step in its fundamental transformation. The IS's restructuring strategy is aimed at transforming IS from a caliphate-building organisation to a global terrorist movement.

Exemplary for this new strategy of IS was the attack staged in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday in April 2019. The Islamist attackers targeted three churches and luxury hotels. Their suicide bombings killed 259 people, including 45 foreigners and injured about 700 more people. After a hiatus of five years, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi appeared in a video and claimed IS responsibility for the attack.<sup>8</sup> Exemplary was the Sri Lanka attack also for governments' preparedness, or better the lack thereof, for the IS's changed strategy. It is likely that unless governments reflect on the IS's strategy and disrupt its planned decentralisation, the threat posed by IS will grow globally. A lack in an appropriate response, which sets the boundaries for the spread and expansion of IS, even more might lead to further the escalation of violence.

While IS has become 'a shadow of itself' in its former strongholds, al Qaeda took advantage of the situation through the spread of its ideology, the creation of radicalising threat groups and augmentation of the number of followers worldwide. The strength of al Qaeda's core, which is led by Dr. Aymen al Zawahiri, only has a strength of less than 100 fighters based in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, al Zawahiri commands over 100,000 affiliate fighters in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Al Qaeda expanded to Saudi Arabia (2003), Iraq (2004), Algeria (2006), and Yemen (2007), Somalia (2010), Syria (2012), and South Asia (2014) (Holbrook 2017). Today, the Afghan-Taliban remains as the strongest al Qaeda affiliate, which commands approximately 60,000 fighters (Congressional Research Service 2020:7-8). The Afghan-Taliban are currently holding out against the Afghan government, its coalition partners, and the 1,500 to 2,000 IS fighters located in Afghanistan.

The second largest al Qaeda affiliate and vanguard of the al Qaeda coalition, which commands over 10,000 fighters, is HTS in northern Syria (Soliev 2019). The HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Julani broke away from IS, which was the forerunner of the militant group. In addition to receiv-

---

8 Gettleman. New York Times, 23 April 2019.



ing support from other groups aligned to al Qaeda located in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, HTS trains other al Qaeda-affiliated groups in Iraq and Syria. On their return to their home countries, these trained, motivated and networked fighters are prepared to conduct violence. Driven by geopolitics, some anti-Assad Arab and other governments, however, continue to support the Idlib based al Qaeda aligned coalition. Like IS, al Qaeda and its affiliates pose a continuing threat to both the security of the Levant and beyond (Fitton-Brown 2020).

And al Qaeda expanded eastward, too. The al Qaeda affiliate Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) recruited at least 3,000 Uighurs, mostly from Xinjiang, China's claimed western front against terrorism (Soliev 2016). Also known as East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the military wing of TIP trained in Pakistan-Afghanistan (Reed and Raschke 2010) and later in Iraq-Syria. The activities are, however, not limited to training alone, but these Uighur fighters are linked to both central Islamist networks. Many hundreds were killed or captured fighting alongside with al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, HTS and IS in Iraq and Syria. Uighurs travel to the Middle East transiting through Central Asia or Southeast Asia. Currently, the bulk of the Uighurs serve in the ranks of HTS. In China and overseas, motivated, skilled and networked Uighur fighters are able and willing to mount attacks.<sup>9</sup>

An extension of al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia – Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – operates in Yemen but draws its strength from Saudis and Yemenis. With an estimated strength of 8,000 members and supporters,<sup>10</sup> it fights both the Iranian backed Houthis and IS.<sup>11</sup> AQAP mounted operations overseas including the Northwest Airlines Flight 253 in Detroit, Cargo planes bomb plot, and the notorious Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris (Stanford University 2020). With its presence in Western states, AQAP's potential to attack increased. As such, AQAP presents a significant threat to the West.

Of the dozen al Qaeda affiliates, al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) is one of the smallest entities. The AQIS leadership is in Afghanistan, but operates in Pakistan, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh (The Soufan Center 2020). The group of about 300 fighters (Zulqurnian 2019) has recently suffered from setbacks. While both al Qaeda and IS attempted to exploit the situation in Myanmar, and shown their interest in

---

9 Zulfiqar. BBC News, 18 February 2020.

10 Michael. AP News, 7 August 2018.

11 Raghavan. The Washington Post, 14 April 2019.

recruiting militants from Myanmar, their respective success was limited. Some claim that among others their ability to mobilise seems to be limited by the nationalist nature of the Rohingyas' interests involved in the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Another branch of the militant group called al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is very strong in Libya, and to a lesser extent in the Sahel and West Africa. AQIM is engaged in active armed conflicts against the government and IS forces (The Cipher Brief 2019). Although the group has a presence in other countries in the Maghreb (North Africa), AQIM is expanding throughout Africa as a whole. Originating as the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria, AQIM's numerical strength is about 6,000 fighters and supporters.

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) draws its strength from groups in Mali and West Africa. Also known as the al Qaeda in Mali, the 800-member group presents a sustained threat to government forces, including to the UN Peacekeepers present in the country.<sup>13</sup> The group has links to AQIM and other al Qaeda-aligned groups in Africa (Centre for Strategic and International Studies 2020).

Al Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula (AQSP) consists of al Qaeda-aligned groups operating in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Although the Egyptian authorities have been fighting the groups, the threat has also expanded to mainland Egypt. With a strength of a few hundred fighters and supporters, the group has built links with groups both in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa (Ryan 2019). Their most recent attacks included the attack on the Israel-Egypt gas pipeline.<sup>14</sup>

Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen known as al Shabab wages a sustained insurgent and terrorist campaign in Somalia. In 2019, its deadliest attack included a hotel siege resulting in the death of 26 people<sup>15</sup> and the Mogadishu bombing, which claimed the lives of 85 people (Garowe Online 2019). Active in East Africa, the 8,000-member strong group pledged allegiance to al Qaeda already in 2012. A threat to Somalia's neighbours, the group maintains a support base in Kenya, and in addition mounts periodic attacks in Nairobi.

---

12 Conversation between extremists in IS-affiliated Telegram groups. 14 October 2019.

13 Isilow. Anadolu Post, 27 January 2020.

14 Al-Monitor, 13 February 2020.

15 Al-Jazeera, 13 July 2019.

*Extreme Right Wing (XRW) as Response to the Global Islamist Threat*

Two decades of global terrorism by al Qaeda and IS have resulted in the emergence of the Extreme Right Wing (XRW). As a response to violent Islamism, its spread and continued terrorist campaigns, the Extreme Right Wing has built networks throughout Western countries. The threat posed by such XRW-groups, linking to white supremacists, grows with their ideology's rising appeal in the course of increasing spread and radicalisation of Islam in the West. The growing support for the XRW claims in Western societies, has incentivised some political parties to take over elements of the XRW narrative and demands. Breaking the taboo to reject the spread of Islam in the West, XRW and political parties have attracted growing support within the wider population and thus increasingly seek to capitalise on it.<sup>16</sup>

While the number and intensity of attacks are comparatively limited, there have been some essential attacks in the last year (2019). However, the attackers were not part of an organisation or elaborate networks, such as IS or al Qaeda. The most devastating attack staged by the XRW was in Christchurch (CHCH), New Zealand. A 28-year-old Australian, Brenton Tarrant, attacked the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre. In his attack on 15 March 2019, he killed 51 (Bailey 2019) and injured 49 others. A crucial feature, shared by other attackers, was that Tarrant livestreamed the first attack on Facebook.<sup>17</sup> The Christchurch assault galvanised individuals in other countries, even though they were not part of a specific organisation. Such individuals include a 19-year-old American, John Timothy Earnest. After dedicating the act to Brenton Tarrant, Earnest killed a woman and injured three, in an attack of the Chabad of Poway synagogue in Poway, California, on 27 April 2019.<sup>18</sup> Earnest attempted to livestream the shooting on Facebook but failed.

Although most of these attackers foreshadowed their intent on social media, both attackers had no known organisational links and had been very secretive before the attack. One of the earlier attacks today considered part of the XRW was the massacres carried out by the Norwegian Anders Breivik in July 2011. Soon after the CHCH attack followed the attack by a 27-year-old German, Stephan Balliet. He perpetrated the Halle synagogue shooting on 9 October 2019 and brought this *new* kind of extreme right

---

16 Bonikowski. Washington Post, 2 December 2019.

17 Gunia. Time Magazine, 15 March 2019.

18 Spagat. USA Today, 19 September 2019.

violence to Germany as well.<sup>19</sup> After failing to enter the synagogue in Germany during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, he killed two people nearby and later injured two others. Balliet, too, attempted to and finally did stream his act online with video and audio from his action camera on his helmet.<sup>20</sup>

Particularly Muslim and Jewish communities became targets of these attacks. Based on the ideological background of the XRW spreading throughout the Western countries, it appears likely that these communities remain to be the central targets in near future. While considering themselves as defenders of the Western (white), Christian community against Islamism, their actions provide room for exploitation by the Islamist groups themselves. In the Islamist terrorist narrative, attacks by Westerners on the Muslim communities provide opportunities for Islamist groups to seek revenge against Western targets, creating a cycle of vengeance. With reciprocal radicalisation and counter-strikes, the cycle of attacks between XRW and Muslim groups is very likely to increase in 2020 (Yeo 2019). From these events, it seems, that governments should regulate the religious space.

### *Escalation in Iran?*

The conflict between the US and Iran has been ongoing, but the recent developments suggest a further violent escalation and thus the increase of violence. The United States' assassination of one of the central political figures in Iran, Major General Qassim Soleimani, in January 2020 has laid the ground for violent retaliation by diverse groups sponsored by the Iranian government.

On 2 January 2020, the US killed Soleimani in an airstrike at Baghdad International Airport in Iraq. The general had been the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Quds Force – the military entity's overseas wing. Soleimani is considered to have been the mastermind of Iran's policy of fighting the US and Western presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, the two countries bordering Iran.<sup>21</sup>

The assassination was considered a pre-emptive strike as reflected in the Pentagon's statement that "General Soleimani was actively developing

---

19 Oltermann. *The Guardian*, 9 October 2019.

20 Eddy. *New York Times*, 9 October 2019.

21 BBC News, 3 January 2020.

plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region” adding that “General Soleimani and his Quds Force were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of American and coalition service members and the wounding of thousands more” (@WhiteHouse, 3 January 2020). The strike was authorised by US President Trump based on intelligence information, which claimed that IRGC planned to conduct operations against US targets in the Middle East. US President Trump tweeted that Soleimani was “directly and indirectly responsible for the death of millions of people” (@realDonaldTrump, 3 January 2020) and “should have been taken out many years ago!” (@realDonaldTrump, 3 January 2020). Soleimani is made responsible for providing both Iraqi and Afghan threat groups with advanced bomb-making equipment and training that made the US presence untenable in Iraq and Afghanistan, too. Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei wrote on Twitter “Martyr Soleimani is an international figure of resistance & all such people will seek revenge” (@khamenei\_ir, 3 January 2020). As Iran vowed to retaliate, the US State Department urged American citizens to leave Iraq. The revenge attacks seem however not limited to Iranian forces.<sup>22</sup> The Lebanese Hezbollah, Shia militia groups and Sunni threat groups sponsored by Iran are likely to retaliate against Western targets, especially US interests, too.

The assassination furthermore has implications for the confinement of the IS. The hostility towards Soleimani was not limited to the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia. The IS, too, had seen Soleimani as a threat. Soleimani had not only deployed the IRGC units to fight against IS, but had engaged in arming, training and financing tens of thousands of Shia militia, who would fight against and severely challenge the IS (Soufan 2018).

Even prior to the formation of IS, its predecessor groups were incessantly targeting Shia in Iraq. In response, Iran had deployed Lebanese Hezbollah, Qods Corps, Fatimion and Zeynabion Brigades to confront the threat of IS.<sup>23</sup> After IS moved from Iraq to Syria, the Assad regime was about to fall. General Soleimani had deployed over 100,000 militias into Syria to support the Assad regime. In addition to deploying the well-established Shia militia, General Soleimani trained local Shia militias to fight against IS. General Soleimani had organised these forces in Syria and then strengthened their presence in Iraq. He was since credited for defending

---

22 Marquis. Reuters, 12 February 2020.

23 These Brigades were from the Shia of Parachenar in Pakistan and some Pakistanis who claim to defend the Zeynab Holy Shrine.

the Iraqi and Syrian regimes and the Shia communities in both Syria and Iraq during the conflict and is claimed to have created the ground forces to fight IS and thus to defended both communities and regimes to thwart the IS threat.<sup>24</sup> This breaking away of a strong figure in the opposition to the IS is likely to have significant impacts on the threat landscape, too.

### *Conclusion*

Overall, the paper has discussed how the outlined processes have led to an escalation of terrorist violence. Firstly, the concerted effort to defeat IS in Syria and Iraq led to two major trends, the re-emergence of al Qaeda and the global expansion of IS. Secondly, fears of Islamist terrorism have resulted in the rise of XRW movements as seen through the numerous mosque shootings. Finally, the US assassination of the Iraqi Major General Qassim Soleimani is expected to inspire more Iran-sponsored attacks against US interests in the Middle East.

This paper has outlined the current global terrorist threat landscape and identified trends which are likely to lead to an escalation of violence. This paper explored the potential surge in violence perpetrated by terrorists as a result of the dynamic political and strategic global context. Consequently, the paper argues for the following political measures. First, it points to the need to exercise force for countering terrorism proportionality. As was shown on the example of the IS-al Qaeda contention and the Islamist terrorists and those of the extreme right wing, and as is found in other cases, the excessive use of force is likely to intensify violent retaliation. Nationally, it is paramount for governments to partner community stakeholders to counter religious radicalisation and to promote psychological resilience through social cohesion (Echle et al. 2018).

Against the backdrop of a resurgent al Qaeda and an IS morphing from concentrating its forces at the Iraqi and Syrian battlefield into a transnational terrorist network, a global strategy to counter this is required. Unless the global terrorist threat is contained, isolated and eliminated, the tempo of exclusivism, extremism and terrorism is likely to increase in 2020. The cooperating world needs a new strategy to combat two deadly global movements and therewith to manage reciprocal radicalisation. While the rise of the XRW is a result of the many years of Islamist terrorism worldwide, XRW, IS and al Qaeda now mutually reinforcing each oth-

---

24 Younes. Al-Jazeera, 6 January 2020.

er's mobilisation capacities. The resulting rifts in societies all over the world furthermore nurture radicalisation and the escalation into violence.

Given that IS, al Qaeda and several XRW outfits operate across borders, governments and partners need to cooperate, collaborate and build partnerships at multiple levels. As the threat is networked, the governments need to build common databases, exchange personnel, conduct joint training and operations, share experiences, expertise and resources, especially technology.

It cannot be stressed enough that governments need to overcome geopolitical interests and instead cooperate in the face of IS and al Qaeda posing a threat globally. To recall, the global command structures of al Qaeda and IS stretch from Africa to the Caucasus and from the Middle East to Asia. Both al Qaeda and IS have co-opted local groups and built capabilities to expand their influence. They continue to disseminate propaganda, raise funds and recruit. In addition to carrying out attacks in their home and neighbouring countries, they will also motivate individuals, cells and networks in Western states to carry out attacks. Although their local affiliates cooperate on occasions, the IS-al Qaeda leadership dispute compels them more to compete with each other. After the death of the incumbent leaders, however, the two ideological akin movements might work together, at least in some theatres. If there was a fusion or merger of the movements, the global threat to governments and societies would increase exponentially.

Governments should work together to address common security challenges. Instead, however, on 9 October 2019, Turkey launched Operation Peace Spring to secure its borders north of Syria and east of the Euphrates River. A sequel to Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch and Peace Spring, the aim thereby is to fight the Kurdish groups which played a pivotal role in the military defeat of IS. The US troops' withdrawal furthermore creates a vacuum, which is likely to be filled by power interested states, such as Turkey, Russia, Iran, and threat groups, IS as well as al Qaeda coalition partners, especially HTS, in the immediate-term. Herein itself lies the potential for violent escalation. If the geopolitical agendas of governments, such as Turkey, take a priority over the security concerns, opportunities for violence will arise, as IS will be enabled to reconstitute in the short- and re-emerge as a formidable threat in the mid-term. Unless governments work together to fight both a resurgent al Qaeda and a weakened IS, the threat will return with a greater vengeance.

References

- Al-Jazeera. 2019. "26 killed in hours-long al-Shabab hotel siege in Somalia". *Al-Jazeera*, 13 July 2019. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/somalia-security-forces-al-shabab-hotel-siege-13-dead-190713053920981.html>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Al-Monitor. 2020. "Militants blow up Israel-Egypt gas pipeline". *Al-Monitor*, 13 February 2020. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/02/egypt-israel-gas-pipeline-sinai-islamic-state-attack.html>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Bailey, Dominic. 2019. "Chirstchurch Shootings: How the Attacks Unfolded." *BBC News*, 18 March 2019. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47582183>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- BBC News. 2020. "Iran's Qasem Soleimani: Why the US had Him in its Sites". *BBC News*, 3 January 2020. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50980093>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Bonikowski, Bart. 2019. "Mainstream conservative parties paved the way for far-right nationalism". *The Washington Post*, 2 December 2019. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/02/mainstream-conservative-parties-paved-way-far-right-nationalism/>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Centre for Strategic and International Studies. 2018. "Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)". *Backgrounder*. (<https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/terrorism-backgrounders/jamaat-nasr-al-islam-wal-muslimin>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Congressional Research Service (US). "Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy in Brief". Clayton Thomas. R45122. Washington, DC: 2020. United States Government. (<https://fas.org/spp/crs/row/R45122.pdf>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Echle, Christian et al. 2018. *Combating Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Asia and Europe: From Cooperation to Collaboration*. Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.
- Eddy, Melissa. 2019. "Assailant Live-Streamed Attempted Attack on German Synagogue." *New York Times*, 9 October 2019. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/09/world/europe/germany-shooting-halle-synagogue.html>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Fenwick, Stewart. 2016. *Blasphemy, Islam and the State: Pluralism and Liberalism in Indonesia*. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Fitton-Brown, Edmund. 2020. "The Persistent Threat from the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda: The View from the UN". The Washington Institute. 6 February 2020. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-persistent-threat-from-the-islamic-state-and-al-qaeda-the-view-from-the>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.



- Garowe Online. 2019. "Somalia: Al-Shabaab Claims Responsibility for Mogadishu Bomb Attack". *Garowe Online*, 30 December 2019. (<https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-al-shabaab-claims-responsibility-for-mogadishu-bomb-attack>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Gettleman, Jeffrey. 2019. "ISIS Claims Sri Lanka Attacks, and President Vows Shakeup". *New York Times*, 23 April 2019. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/23/world/asia/isis-sri-lanka-blasts.html>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Glenn, Cameron. 2015. "Al Qaeda vs ISIS: Ideology and Strategy". *Wilson Center*, 28 September 2015. (<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-v-isis-ideology-y-strategy>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Grierson, Jamie. 2019. "Rise of the far right: a disturbing mix of hateful ideologies". *The Guardian*, 19 September 2019. (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/19/rise-of-the-far-right-a-disturbing-mix-of-hateful-ideologies>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Gunaratna, Rohan. 2019. "The Global Threat Forecast for 2019". *Straits Times*, 1 January 2019. (<https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-global-threat-forecast-for-2019>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Gunia, Amy. 2019. "Facebook Tightens Live-Stream Rules in Response to the Christchurch Massacre". *Time Magazine*, 15 March 2019. (<https://time.com/5589478/facebook-livestream-rules-new-zealand-christchurch-attack/>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Holbrook, Donald. 2017. *Al-Qaeda 2.0: A Critical Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Isilow, Hassan. 2020. "20 Troops Killed in Mali Attack, Militants Suspected". *Anadolu Post*, 27 January 2020. (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/20-troops-killed-in-mali-attack-militants-suspected/1715414>). Accessed on 30 February 2020.
- Marquis, Julie. 2020. "Tehran-backed Hezbollah steps in to guide Iraqi militias in Soleimani's wake". *Reuters*, 12 February 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-iraq-hezbollah-insight/tehran-backed-hezbollah-steps-in-to-guide-iraqi-militias-in-soleimanis-wake-idUSKBN20520Y>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- McKernan, Bethan. 2019. "Isis Defeated, US-backed Syrian Forces Announce." *The Guardian*, 23 March 2019. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/23/isis-defeated-us-backed-syrian-democratic-forces-announce>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Michael, Maggie. 2018. "AP Investigation: US Allies, Al-Qaida Battle Rebels in Yemen". *AP News*, 7 August 2018. (<https://apnews.com/f38788a561d74ca78c77cb43612d50da/AP-investigation:-Yemen-war-binds-US,-allies,-al-Qaida>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Oltermann, Philip. 2019. "Germany: Mass Shooting Attempt That Killed Two was Anti-Semitic Attack, Minister Says". *The Guardian*, 9 October 2019. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/09/two-people-killed-in-shooting-in-germany-city-of-halle>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.

- Pengelly, Martin. 2019. "Trump Confirms Ushas Killed Osama bin Laden's Son Hamza." *The Guardian*, 14 September 2019. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/14/trump-confirms-us-has-killed-osama-bin-ladens-son-hamza>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Plebani, Daniele. 2019. "Remain and Reshaping: IS' Second Reorganization". *IT-STime*, 7 January 2019. (<https://www.itstime.it/w/remain-and-reshaping-iss-second-generation-by-daniele-plebani/>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Pokalova, Elena. 2019. "The Threat From ISIS is Closer to Home Than Ever." *The Defense Post*, 6 December 2019. (<https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/12/06/isis-london-bridge-attack-opinion/>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Postings, Robert. 2019. "Islamic State Turkey province video claims new wilayah in old turf". *The Defense Post*, 11 July 2019, (<https://thedefensepost.com/2019/07/11/islamic-state-turkey-province-bayah-video/>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Raghavan, Sudarsan. 2019. "With the ISIS caliphate defeated in Syria, an Islamist militant rivalry takes root in Yemen". *The Washington Post*, 14 April 2019. ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/with-the-once-declared-caliphate-of-isis-defeated-in-syria-an-islamist-militant-rivalry-takes-root-in-yemen/2019/04/13/d54148a6-34d3-4a67-a40a-9dc4f783338e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/with-the-once-declared-caliphate-of-isis-defeated-in-syria-an-islamist-militant-rivalry-takes-root-in-yemen/2019/04/13/d54148a6-34d3-4a67-a40a-9dc4f783338e_story.html)). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Reed, Todd J. and Raschke, Diane. 2010. *The ETIM: China's Islamic Militants and the Global Terrorist Threat United States*. Connecticut: Praeger Security International.
- Ryan, Michael W.S. 2019. "Al-Qaeda's Long Game in the Sinai". *The Jamestown Foundation*, 14 November 2019. (<https://jamestown.org/program/hot-issue-al-qaeda-long-game-in-the-sinai/>).
- Soliev, Nodiberk. 2016. "Growing Uighur Militancy: Challenges for China". *RSIS Commentary*, CO16027, 4 February 2016. (<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/n/icpvtr/co16027-growing-uighur-militancy-challenges-for-china/#.Xp3hppMzau4>).
- Soliev, Nodiberk. 2019. "Al Qaeda's Resurgence in Syria: A New Caliphate?". *RSIS Commentary*, CO1910, 21 May 2019. ([https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvtr/al-qaedas-resurgence-in-syria-a-new-caliphate/#.Xp3e\\_pMzb\\_Q](https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvtr/al-qaedas-resurgence-in-syria-a-new-caliphate/#.Xp3e_pMzb_Q)).
- Soufan, Ali. 2018. "Qassem Soleimani and Iran's Unique Regional Strategy". *CTC Sentinel*, 11, No.10, (2018): 3-4. (<https://ctc.usma.edu/qassem-soleimani-irans-unique-regional-strategy/>).
- Spagat, Elliot. 2019. "Hearing Begins for California Synagogue Shooting Suspect Who Killed 1, Injured 3". *USA Today*, 19 September 2019. (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2019/09/19/john-t-earnest-hearing-california-synagogue-shooting-hits-court/2376138001/>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Stanford University. 2020. "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula". Mapping Militant Organizations. (<https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- The Cipher Brief. 2019. "Al-Qaeda is Strengthening Its Networks Throughout the Sahel". *Intel Brief*, 18 October 2019, ([https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column\\_article/al-qaeda-is-strengthening-its-networks-throughout-the-sahel](https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column_article/al-qaeda-is-strengthening-its-networks-throughout-the-sahel)).

- The Soufan Center. 2020. "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS): The Nucleus of Jihad in South Asia". *The Soufan Center*, January 2019. (<https://thesoufancenter.org/research/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-aqis-the-nucleus-of-jihad-in-south-asia/>).
- Tsurkov, Elizabeth. 2019. "Who Are Turkey's Proxy Fighters in Syria?". *NYR Daily*, 27 November 2019. (<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/11/27/who-are-turkey-s-proxy-fighters-in-syria/>). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- US Department of Defense. 2019. "Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United Congress". Glenn Fine, 1 April 2019 - 30 June 2019. Washington D.C: United States Government. ([https://media.defense.gov/2019/Aug/09/2002169448/-1/-1/1/Q3FY2019\\_LEADIG\\_OIR\\_REPORT.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2019/Aug/09/2002169448/-1/-1/1/Q3FY2019_LEADIG_OIR_REPORT.PDF)). Accessed on 28 February 2020.
- Yeo, Kenneth. 2019. "Avenging Christchurch Terror: Indonesian Militant Response". *RSIS Commentary*, CO19063, 4 April 2019. (<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvtr/avenging-christchurch-terror-indonesian-militant-responses/#.Xp3t6JmZY6g>).
- Younes, Ali. 2020. "Admired and Reviled: How Soleimani Was Seen in the Middle East". *Al-Jazeera*, 6 January 2020. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/admired-reviled-soleimani-middle-east-200104154825611.html>).
- Zelin, Aaron. 2020. "The Islamic State's Bayat Campaign". *Jihadology (blog)*, 3 November 2019. (<https://jihadology.net/2019/11/03/the-islamic-states-bayat-campaign/>).
- Zulfqar, Ali. "Syria: Who's in Control of Idlib?" *BBC News*, 18 February 2020. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45401474>).
- Zulqernain, M. 2019. "5 Al-Qaida Terrorists Arrested in Pak's Punjab Province". *Outlook: The News Scroll*, 27 December 2019. (<https://www.outlookindia.com/newsscroll/5-alqaida-terrorists-arrested-in-paks-punjab-province/1695155>).
- (@khameni\_ir). 2020. "His efforts & path won't be stopped by his martyrdom, by God's Power, rather a #SevereRevenge awaits the criminals who have stained their hands with his & the other martyrs' blood last night. Martyr Soleimani is an Intl figure of Resistance & all such people will seek revenge. /3". Twitter, 3 January 2020. ([https://twitter.com/khamenei\\_ir/status/1212995728395636736](https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1212995728395636736)).
- (@realDonaldTrump). 2020. "General Qassem Soleimani has killed or badly wounded thousands of Americans over an extended period of time, and was plotting to kill many more ...but he got caught! He was directly and indirectly responsible for the death of millions of people, including the recent large number...". Twitter, 3 January 2020. (<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1213096351296299017?lang=en>).
- (@realDonaldTrump). 2020. "...of PROTESTERS killed in Iran itself. While Iran will never be able to properly admit it, Soleimani was both hated and feared within the country. They are not nearly as saddened as the leaders will let the outside world believe. He should have been taken out many years ago!". Twitter, 3 January 2020. (<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1213096351296299017?lang=en>).

(@WhiteHouse). 2020. "General Soleimani was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region". Twitter, 3 January 2020. (<https://twitter.com/whitehouse/status/1212934433206079488?lang=en>).

# The Historical Context and Regional Social Network Dynamics of Radicalisation and Recruitment of Islamic State Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Indonesia and its Southeast Asian Neighbours

*Greg Barton*

## *Introduction*

The declaration of the Islamic State (IS) Caliphate across northern Syria and Iraq, by ISIS leader, and self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in recently captured Mosul on 29 June 2014, galvanised global attention. Not only did governments give fresh attention to the threat posed by the decade-old movement that had waxed, waned, and waxed again, so too did those who were drawn to its utopian siren-song of radicalisation. Up until the rapid territorial expansion of ISIS that commenced in mid-2013 most foreign fighters in its ranks had come from neighbouring Arab states. Once the expansion began, and especially after the declaration of the caliphate, fighters and supporters streamed in from 80 countries from every corner of the globe. Between 2014 and 2018 around 6,000 people from Western Europe alone flowed through Turkey to Syria and Iraq to support the so-called caliphate (Cook and Vale 2018 cite 5,904, from Western Europe, including 1,023 women and 1,502 minors, and 7,252 from Russia and Eastern Europe, including 1,396 women and 1,255 children). As families and communities were caught by surprise renewed attention was given to the phenomenon of radicalisation. The sudden transformation of lives from areligious to foreign fighter triggered a focus on seeking to understand individual factors.

Even in Southeast Asia – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore in particular – where radicalisation had been a longstanding problem, the rapid escalation in people from all walks of life setting out to join the caliphate shocked governments and communities alike. There the numbers were, counter-intuitively, much smaller: 1,010, including 355 women and 350 minors (according to Cook and Vale 2018), although these figures do not include the 570 Indonesians that were detained in Turkey before they could enter Syria.

The concept of radicalisation is paradoxical, in usage it can be both a notoriously nebulous and ambiguous term or one that is invoked to explain specific behaviour and concrete outcomes (Neumann 2013; McDonald 2018; Sedgwick 2010). Its ultimate utility depends upon care in clarifying what precisely it is being used to describe and in what context. This chapter is concerned with understanding radicalisation into engagement with violent movements and organisations in contemporary Southeast Asia.

In Southeast Asia, to a much greater extent than Western Europe, IS radicalisation has involved well-established Salafi-jihadi terrorist networks originally aligned with al Qaeda (Barton 2020). The rise of the IS caliphate breathed new life into these networks and re-energised their local and regional activism. This local channelling of IS support might be one key reason why regional outflows of foreign fighters and supporters from Southeast Asia to Syria and Iraq were not even larger.

Based on what is reported in the media about lone-actor attacks, it can be tempting to think of radicalisation as a very individual phenomenon. Loose concepts or phrases such as ‘self-radicalisation’ bolster the impression that radicalisation revolves around an individual and the choices that they make (Borum 2011, Ilardi 2013; Vergani et al. 2018). This is not entirely wrong, and certainly if individuals have radicalised into violence and committed a crime, they need to be held accountable for their choices. But if we are to better understand how radicalisation occurs and find ways to prevent it, or at least to reduce its effects, then we need to understand the broader context in which radicalisation occurs.

It is quite rare for individuals to radicalise in complete isolation. Watching videos or reading texts alone in a darkened room may well be part of an individual’s trajectory of radicalisation, but there is much more to radicalisation than the consumption of radical material. In the vast majority of cases, radicalisation into violence involves a pathway of recruitment into a new social group (Bortha 2014; Nilsson 2015; Porter and Keibell 2011). Ideas and messaging are important, but they are rarely the sole drivers of the radicalisation process. Generally, it is the social relationships formed which lead to a seeker diving deeper into the movement’s media and, in time, internalising its core narratives, propelled by a natural desire to fit into a new circle of friends and associates.

Not only are individuals radicalised through social networks, but often local social networks are themselves further radicalised by global networks. The radicalisation of individuals into Islamist circles in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, is, to a significant extent, linked to a broader pattern of the mutation of local movements into globalised networks and the transforma-

tion of local conflicts into frontline fights as part of an aggressive global jihad (Nilsson 2015).

The evolution of Indonesia's extremist Islamist networks is one case in point. In Indonesia, the historical roots of extremist Islamism begin with the rise of proto-Islamist movements in the context of mid-20th century nationalism and in the subsequent generation of locally-focused proto-jihadi movements such as Indonesia's Dar'ul Islam movement in the 1950s and 1960s (Barton 1997). The Dar'ul Islam (literally, the 'abode of Islam') movement had its origins in West Java in January 1948, when local Sundanese militant Kartosuwirjo led a breakaway insurgency as the leader of one of the many nationalist militia resisting efforts by the Dutch military to retake control of their former colony (Barton 2002:47). Unhappy with the lack of recognition that he and his militia were receiving from the nationalist leaders, in August 1949 Kartosuwirjo declared the mountainous territory under the control of his fighters in West Java to be 'Negara Islam Indonesia' (NII – the Islamic State of Indonesia) (Barton 2004; ICG 2002).

In 1952, Kartosuwirjo's fledgling Dar'ul Islam NII in the highlands of West Java was joined in allegiance by a like-minded insurgency in the jungle of Southern Sulawesi led by Abdu Kahar Muzakkar. Muzakkar's local insurgency in Southern Sulawesi began as a regional dispute but mutated into an Islamist cause. Both insurgencies used the support of local communities, reinforced by an enhanced sense of religious justification, to retain control of their rugged, heavily-wooded, domains for more than a decade. In 1962, Kartosuwirjo was arrested and put on trial. Three years later, in 1965, Muzakkar was killed by the Indonesian military (Barton 2004:47). Their micro religious states were doomed from the outset, but they endured long enough to build resilient communities of 'true-believers' and their influence, and social networks, have continued for 70 years.

As is discussed in detail below, the Islamic State movement headquartered in Syria and Iraq originated as an outgrowth of al Qaeda. And like al Qaeda in the late 1980s in Afghanistan, it has its origins in insurgency and the flow of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF). The ideological origins of al Qaeda began well before the insurgent struggle by Afghan fighters against Soviet forces occupying their country in the 1980s. But it was those circumstances that served to provide a draw for would-be fighters from around the world to travel to the conflict zone to become part, they imagined, of a struggle with implications well beyond one country's desire for independence. The name al Qaeda literally means 'the base' and the organisation was formally established in 1988 to coordinate the training and equipping of foreign terrorist fighters. This was not so that they could fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan, but rather so that they could be

more completely radicalised, trained and equipped to take the fight globally back to their countries of origin.

Around 300 to 400 would-be foreign terrorist fighters travelled from Southeast Asia, predominantly from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, to join in the defensive jihad insurgency in Afghanistan (Barton 2004). Very few of them saw significant front-line combat experience, but they received support from Osama bin Laden and the other leaders of al Qaeda, who recognised that their real value lay not in their contribution to the campaign of the Afghans against the Soviets, but rather in transforming them into *frontline fighters in a global aggressive jihad* that would take local conflicts and transform them into elements of a worldwide campaign.

But how do transnational networks like those of IS and al Qaeda affect the transformation of local conflicts and the spread of violence? This chapter examines the role of networks in the emergence of violence as well as the transformation of conflicts (Kenney 2018). In particular, the example of Indonesia is analysed in the context of the evolution of IS and the phenomenon of FTFs. This perspective is employed to provide an outlook to the transformation of other conflicts in other Southeast Asian states.

### *Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah*

While so far it is only in the southern Philippines that IS has been able to transform a local conflict into large-scale destruction, in Indonesia, as in the Philippines, IS has succeeded in securing the allegiance of many of the key established terrorist networks. In particular, it made deep inroads into the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) networks giving them new energy and drawing in new recruits (Barton 2005; Barton 2015; Chalk 2019; IPAC 2017; Solahudin 2013).

JI was itself formed out of older terrorist networks, notably of the Dar'ul Islam movement, which despite government campaigns targeting its leadership has proven to be a resilient multigenerational network. The two foundational leaders of JI, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abdullah Sungkar, were long-time activists and leaders in Dar'ul Islam (Barton 2004:49-56). In 1969 the pair established a pirate radio station – Radio Dakwah Islamiyah Surakarta – in the central Javanese city of Surakarta, also known as Solo. Then three years later, in 1972, they established a conservative Islamic school, Pesantren al-Mukmin, in Ngruki, a suburb of Solo.

In the late 1970s, the Suharto regime attempted to eradicate the remnants of the Dar'ul Islam movement by means of an elaborate sting opera-



tion (Barton 2002; Barton 2004:48; Barton 2009; Barton 2010; ICG 2002). The sting used the pretext of a supposed threat from remnants of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) that had been destroyed in a vicious pogrom in late 1965 and early 1966. The pogrom had come at the instigation of the CIA. It was part of a bloody transition that ended the presidency of leftist populist Sukarno and saw him replaced with the then little-known general Suharto, establishing a right-of-centre military backed regime that came to be known as the New Order regime (Cribb et al. 1990; Elegant 2001; Elson 2001).

Lured into the open, the Dar'ul Islam leaders were rounded-up and prosecuted. Sungkar and Ba'asyir were jailed in 1978, but released in 1982. When a legal challenge to their early release was about to commence, they made a strategic retreat, or *hijrah*, to Malaysia in 1985 (Barton 2004:14-15, 39). From their sanctuary in Kuala Lumpur, and reunited with many of their Dar'ul Islam fellows, who had fled from Indonesia to Malaysia, they campaigned openly to recruit *mujahidin* to travel to Afghanistan-Pakistan and train with what was to become al Qaeda (Barton 2004:14-16, 32-33).

Even after the fighting concluded with the Soviet withdrawal at the end of the decade, they continued to send Southeast Asians to al Qaeda's camps on the rugged Afghanistan-Pakistan border to be trained and equipped to return home and continue the jihadi struggle in Southeast Asia. It was from this crucible that new terrorist organisations like the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Mindanao were formed (taking for their name the name of a prominent al Qaeda patron Abdul Rasul Sayyaf (Barton 2004:109).

And it was in one of al Qaeda's main training camps in 1993 that Ba'asyir and Sungkar declared that henceforth they were separating from Dar'ul Islam and were forming a new network known simply as the Community of Islam – Jemaah Islamiyah – borrowing the name of the terrorist wing of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (in Egyptian Arabic referred to as Gamaah Islamiyah (Barton 2004:51, 59). The two men returned to Solo in 1999 and the next year Ba'asyir established the high-profile, non-violent organisation, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI - the Mujahidin Council of Indonesia), even while JI continued to grow and expand as an underground movement build around a nucleus of 'Afghani alumni'. In 1999, shortly after returning to Indonesia, Sungkar died of natural causes and the leadership of JI fell to Ba'asyir (Barton 2004:56-57).

The collapse of the Suharto regime in May 1998 opened up new opportunities for JI to pursue its aims in Indonesia. Prior to May 1998, JI had concentrated on *dakwah*, building 'pure' Islamic communities and sending *mujahidin* for training abroad. Most of the senior JI activists, including the core of Afghan alumni continued to focus on *dakwah* rather than pursuing

a path of militant jihad. Nevertheless, from late 1999 onwards, elements of JI worked in a low-key fashion on supporting local jihad in Maluku and Sulawesi. And throughout 2000 splinter factions of JI, undetected, carried out a series of terrorist bombings. At the same time JI leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir was pursuing a strategy of working openly through Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia to unite jihadi and non-jihadi radical Islamists and to push for political change (Barton 2004:65-66).

The violence in Ambon, in the province of Maluku, that broke out in late 1999 saw more than 10,000 lives lost in the decade that followed (Barton 2004:77; ICG 2003; Sholeh 2006). The communal conflict ignited a powerful propaganda drive for the recruitment of *mujahidin*. While the high-profile militia Laskar Jihad with 7,000 fighters drawn mostly from Java got most of the attention (Noorhaidi 2006) it was a smaller, less observed militia associated with JI, known as Laskar Jundullah or Laskar Mujahidin, which played a significant role despite the smaller number of well-trained fighters (Barton 2010; Barton 2015; Barton 2018a). JI worked with the Islamic charity KOMPAK to recruit and support *mujahidin* in Ambon (Noorhaidi 2006:32-55).

In 2000, when most of the attention focused on the communal conflict in Maluku, the second front for jihad was erupting in the city of Poso in Central Sulawesi simultaneously. Communal conflict had broken out in Poso on the island of Sulawesi, northeast of Java and due west from Maluku, in late 1998, in the wake of the collapse of the Suharto regime. Several extremist Islamist militias emerged in the midst of the fighting in Poso but, in time, Laskar Jihad, which despite its name was an ultra-nationalist rather than a global jihadi group, faltered and thus offered JI the opportunity to take advantage.

In hindsight, the evolution of JI as a jihadi terrorist group appears clear. Up until the Bali bombing in on 12 October 2002, however, the group's terrorist activities were not at all clear to outsiders and were deeply contested by insiders. Whereas Abudullah Sungkar had been a highly charismatic and respected religious leader, many within JI were sceptical of Abdullah Ba'asyir as his replacement. At the time of his death in Indonesia in late 1999, Sungkar had established a clear direction for JI away from immediate violence and open conflict. Instead, he chartered a course of consolidation, arguing that in post-Suharto Indonesia it was neither the time, nor the place for a campaign of jihadi conflict (Hefner 2000).

Sungkar's death, and the eruption of communal violence in Ambon and Poso, saw less patient, more militant, elements in JI move, largely autonomously, but with the blessing of Ba'asyir, towards direct action. Apart

from *mujahidin* being sent to Ambon and Poso a mysterious series of unclaimed attacks occurred which only later came to be associated with JI.

On 1 August 2000, a powerful bomb blast destroyed the car of the Philippines ambassador as he was returning to his official residence in Menteng, central Jakarta. The ambassador was badly injured and had his Mercedes not been heavily armoured, he would certainly have been killed. On 13 September, a powerful bomb was detonated in the underground car park of the Jakarta Stock Exchange, killing 15 people. Responsibility for the attack was never claimed and at the time neither the attack on the Philippines ambassador, nor attack on the stock exchange were attributed to JI.

On Christmas Eve, a series of near-simultaneous explosions occurred outside churches in Jakarta and in eight other cities, killing 18 people and injuring dozens. Years later the bombings were attributed to the JI bomb-maker, prominent Afghan alumnus and charismatic recruiter Hambali (aka Riduan Isamuddin), currently detained in Guantanamo Bay because of his alleged links with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Like the other attacks that year, these attacks remained a mystery and JI was little suspected of having either the capacity or intention to orchestrate a series of sophisticated terrorist attacks.

A week later, on 30 December 2000, explosions in Manila killed 22 people. Less than two months after the attack in Manila, in February 2001, authorities in Singapore uncovered a sophisticated JI network in the city state which had been lobbying for support from al Qaeda to attack American military personnel from US naval vessels visiting Singapore. They had been alerted by the Americans after al Qaeda documents were discovered in an al Qaeda safe house in Afghanistan detailing an al Qaeda funding bid. One year later, on 12 March 2002, three JI militants were arrested in Manila, and found to be carrying C4 military-issue plastic explosives.

Then in August 2002, respected researcher Sidney Jones and her team, at the Southeast Asian office of the International Crisis Group in Jakarta, published a remarkable report about JI's Ngruki network of jihadi militants (ICG 2002). The following month, *Time* magazine published a lengthy expose with an al Qaeda leader arrested outside Jakarta, detailing JI's extensive links with al Qaeda in Indonesia and the Philippines. Weeks later, on 2 October 2002, a JI bomb exploded in Zamboanga, in western Mindanao, killing three people. Just ten days later, in Bali, Indonesia, an improvised explosive device (IED) in a backpack was detonated in crowded bar, followed by a massive vehicle borne IED (VBIED) in a Mitsubishi minibus being detonated outside the Sari Club, in the tourist district of Kuta. The VBIED explosion resulted in the thatched roof of the Sari Club

being instantly consumed in a massive fireball that generated intense heat. The paired explosions saw 202 people killed and hundreds more injured.

Careful post-blast forensic investigations in Bali by the Indonesian Police, assisted by the Australian Federal Police, led to a breakthrough that resulted in dozens of arrests and revealed clear evidence of an extensive JI terrorist network (Barton 2004:8-12). As a result, the capacity of the 'bombing faction' in JI, led by Hambali, was substantially reduced. Nevertheless, JI continued a campaign of bombings throughout the decade.

On 11 August 2003, Hambali was finally arrested in Thailand, where he had been planning a major terrorist attack (Barton 2004:58). One week earlier, on 5 August 2003, JI bombers had carried out a suicide attack with an explosives-packed van on Jakarta's prestigious JW Marriott Hotel which killed 12 (Barton 2004:58). One year after the attack on the JW Marriott, on 9 September 2004, JI suicide bombers detonated a massive IED in a delivery truck outside the entrance of the Australian embassy in Jakarta. Nine people adjacent to the entrance were killed but many more lives would have been lost, if the embassy had not been extensively 'hardened' with new blast walls and reinforced windows fitted in the wake of the Bali bombings in 2002, in which 88 Australians had been killed. The attacks continued the following year, with 6 people being killed in an explosion on the island of Ceram, Maluku, on 16 May 2005. Two weeks later 22 lives were taken by an explosion in Tentena, near Poso, in Central Sulawesi on 28 May. On 1 October 2005, JI returned to using suicide bombers against foreign tourists in Bali, with three bombers wearing IED-filled backpacks, leading to the death of 20 people dining in restaurants on Jimbaran beach, south of Kuta.

By the end of the decade the new counterterrorism unit of the Indonesian police – Special Detachment 88 – had successfully arrested JI's key bomb-makers and recruiters and largely countered the group's capacity for large-scale attacks (Barton 2018b).

JI's last major attack, before its subsequent resurgence after the rise of ISIS and the Islamic State movement, occurred in Jakarta on 17 July 2009. Employing a colleague working as a florist inside the Ritz-Carlton hotel to bring explosive material into the hotel JI bombers assembled IEDs on site. Then they made use of an underground tunnel connecting the Ritz-Carlton and the JW Marriott Hotel to carry out suicide attacks with small IEDs carried in backpacks. The explosions detonated five minutes apart killed seven people and injured 50.

In February 2010, a substantial terrorist training camp linked to JI and other jihadi groups was discovered in Aceh within weeks of having been established. This led to a fresh round of arrests and prosecutions, including

that of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, and resulted in JI terrorist activity in Indonesia being greatly diminished during the first half of the new decade. In hindsight, it was only with the rise of IS and the conflict in Iraq and Syria, that JI was able to attract a new generation of recruits.

Detachment 88 became enormously effective in detecting and disrupting terrorist plots. Since its formation 15 years ago, it has arrested more than 1,400 alleged terrorists. Of these, approximately 808 were arrested between 2015 and early 2018, with a further 376 arrests made in 2018 alone. A further 24 people were killed during violent confrontations (Azman and Arianti 2019).

The vast majority of those arrested were successfully prosecuted and sentenced. Together with the establishment of Special Detachment 88 (Detasemen Khusus – Densus) a new national agency was established – the National Agency for Combating Terrorism (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme, BNPT) to manage the strategic coordination of counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) programmes.

This tactical CT success is remarkable but it has itself generated its own problems. Indonesian prisons are crowded, poorly-resourced and well over-capacity. In Indonesia more than 250,000 people are detained in around 500 prisons – roughly twice the design capacity of the prisons. And the prisoner to prison guard ratio is around 55 to 1, making the management of terrorism detainees extremely difficult (Kfir 2018).

### *The Evolution of the Islamic State Movement*

Just as the first wave of FTFs in Southeast Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s was tied to the rise of al Qaeda, the second – and larger – wave of FTFs, from 2013 to 2018, was tied to the rise of ISIS. Consequently, it is not possible to understand the emergence of the phenomena of Southeast Asian foreign fighters without the emergence and development of ISIS.

ISIS – the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (al-Sham), also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), but now correctly known simply as the Islamic State (IS) – arose out of what was commonly known as al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), a group that emerged under the leadership of Musab al-Zarqawi in 2004 and which later referred to itself as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). AQI/ISI quickly became a formidable insurgent group under the fearsome leadership of al-Zarqawi (Cockburn 2015; Fishman 2016; Fawaz 2016; McCants 2015a, Stern and Berger 2015; Warrick 2015; Wassertein 2017; Weiss and Hassan 2016; Wood 2018). Circumstances following the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 led to 'perfect' storm conditions

for the emergence of multiple insurgencies. In the midst of a chaotic dynamic of competing insurgencies, AQI came to assert itself as the predominant and most formidable of all the insurgent groups. Ironically, prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 it appears that al Qaeda had no or very little presence in Iraq. Al-Zarqawi himself was Jordanian and was linked with al Qaeda in Jordan, which included the orchestration of the Marriott hotel bombings of 2005 in Aman (McCants 2015b).

As the civil war in Syria opened up a new front this group transformed itself into the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria. It came to dominate not just the conflict but also the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters, both in their source countries and amongst those newly arrived across the border from Turkey (Byman 2019; Zelin 2020).

The complex developments of the conflict in Iraq and Syria can be better understood by setting it alongside the evolution of ISIS broken down into five distinct phases:

- i.) AQI – The foundation of al Qaeda in Iraq (1999 - 2006)
- ii.) ISI – The fall and rise of the Islamic State of Iraq (2006 - 2013)
- iii.) ISIS – The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (2013 - 2014)
- iv.) IS 1.0 – The Islamic State Caliphate (2014 - 2018)
- v.) IS 2.0 – The Islamic State Insurgency (since 2018).

Iraq's de-Ba'athification process of May 2003 to June 2004, during which senior technocrats and military officers linked to the Ba'ath party (the vehicle of the Saddam Hussein regime) were removed from office, set the stage for many to join counter-occupation insurgent groups – including AQI (Cockburn 2015). The insurgent groups all benefitted from the substantial reduction in capacity – in the form of manpower, institutional memory, specialist expertise and leadership – that befell the Iraqi Security Forces. Some, especially AQI, also benefitted from the flow of many of those frustrated leaders and experts into the ranks of the insurgents.

Without the sacking of a large portion of Iraq's military and security leaders, its technocrats and productive middle-class professionals, it's not clear whether this group would have come to dominate so comprehensively. These alienated Sunni professionals gave AQI, as well as IS, much of its core military and strategic competency.

AQI was almost totally destroyed after the Sunni awakening began in 2006, despite the windfall opportunity presented to al-Zarqawi by the frustration of Sunni interests by Nouri al-Maliki's Shia-dominated government from 2006 to 2014, perceived to deprive them of any immediate hope for

the future and confidence in protecting their families and communities (Cockburn 2015, Gerges 2016; Wasserstein 2017).

But in 2010, the greatly underestimated Abu Bakr al Baghdadi took charge of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and began working on a sophisticated long-term plan. Elements of the strategy went by the name of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign. Over the 12 months to July 2013, this strategy entailed the movement literally breaking down the prison walls in compounds around Baghdad which held hundreds of hard-core al Qaeda fighters.

Al Baghdadi recognised the opportunities afforded by the civil war in Syria and dispatched one of his trusted deputies, al-Jaulani, to set up a new jihadi militia in northern Syria. This group, Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN), was very effective in building local support and in drawing in foreign fighters. Al Baghdadi encouraged JaN in Syria and its recruitment of foreign fighters throughout 2012 and 2013 but in the latter part of 2013 he initiated attempts to merge JaN with ISI. His erstwhile protégé Abu Mohammad al-Jaulani resisted this and protested to al Qaeda leader al-Zawahiri. Al-Zawahiri initially encouraged both sides to work out the differences but in February 2014 became impatient with al Baghdadi and declared that whilst JaN would continue as an al Qaeda affiliate, al Qaeda would have no further association with ISI. In response, al Baghdadi transformed ISI into ISIS, and enjoyed considerable success in winning over many of the former JaN members, including the bulk of their foreign fighters to join ISIS (McCants 2015b).

Then, a series of events turned IS from an insurgency employing terrorist methods into a becoming nascent rogue state. These included: the occupation of Raqqa on the Syrian Euphrates in December 2013; the taking of Ramadi a month later; consolidation of IS control throughout Iraq’s western Anbar province; and, finally, a sudden surge down the river Tigris in June 2014 that took Mosul and most of the towns and cities along the river north of Baghdad within less than a week.

IS’s declaration of the caliphate on 29 June 2014, was a watershed moment, which is only now being properly understood. In its ground operations, including the governing of aggrieved Sunni communities, IS moved well beyond being simply a terrorist movement. It came to function as a rogue state ruling over around 5 million people in the northern cities of the Euphrates and the Tigris, and defending its territory through conventional military means.

As noted above, throughout 2013 into the first half of 2014, ISIS carried out a campaign of attacks across Iraq and Syria making extensive use of vehicle-based IEDs and suicide bombing missions. Al Baghdadi had early on



determined that in order to build up ISIS to optimum fighting strength, he needed to engineer the jailbreak of the senior al Qaeda leaders who were kept in half a dozen prisons around Baghdad. From July 2012 until July 2013, he carried out a campaign, designed to work towards the freeing of al Qaeda leaders in detention. This culminated in a series of dramatic jailbreaks in July 2013 that saw many hundreds of al Qaeda senior fighters and other terrorist fighters broken out of jails across Iraq. Many of these joined with ISIS. At the same time, ISIS played on disaffected Sunni communities in northern Syria and northern Iraq, particularly in Anbar province in the west of Iraq, and was successful in getting many former Iraqi security force leaders to join with ISIS.

During the first half of 2014, ISIS took over most of the Euphrates River towns and cities in al-Anbar province in the west of Iraq. Then, in June 2014 it launched a *blitzkrieg* of rapid strikes running down the length of the Tigris River in northern Iraq. On 10 June 2014 ISIS successfully invaded and occupied Mosul – Iraq's second-largest city – and over the space of a week was able to take charge of most of the settlements along the northern Tigris River Valley.

With increasing success, IS was able to attract supporters from all over the world, many of them coming as what has become known as foreign fighters.

### *Foreign Terrorist Fighters before the Caliphate*

Many of those who travelled to Syria to render assistance in rebel held areas in the first year or two of the civil war did not have a clear sense of which groups they were joining and in what ways they were aligning themselves. Almost everyone claimed to be involved in humanitarian relief action and initially few described themselves as joining militias (Yassin-Kasab and al-Shami 2016). This quickly began to change, however, as many were drawn into direct military action (Berger 2018; Byman 2019; Wood 2018; Warrick 2015; Zelin 2020).

Whatever the initial causes of the conflict across Syria, fighting and territory were quickly controlled by organised militias. Some of these militias presented themselves as being non-sectarian but were quickly overpowered by more organised and determined militias aligned with Islamist extremist movements. Many had sympathies and connections with al Qaeda, but the most powerful direct presence in the region consolidated around the group then known as al Qaeda in Iraq or as the Islamic state in Iraq.



Over the previous twelve months ISIS had been very effective in drawing in foreign fighters to the point where it was estimated that by the end of 2013 more than 12,000 foreign fighters had come to join with jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq with most of them joining ISIS and a smaller number joining JaN. In the period from the declaration of the caliphate on 29 June through until the end of 2014, however, the number of foreign fighters coming to fight with ISIS more than doubled. One half of these foreign fighters came from surrounding Arab and North African states but around a quarter of them came from Europe, the UK, Australia, and other Western democracies, or from Asia and the Caucasus. Recruitment of Southeast Asians to join ISIS and JaN had been significant throughout 2013 and the first half of 2014, and accelerated sharply after the declaration of the caliphate (Byman 2019).

### *IS and Foreign Terrorist Fighters*

The conflict in Syria garnered international support and attention at a much higher level than the previous decade of conflict in Iraq had been able to do. As it consolidated its territorial holdings, ISIS was now able to attract thousands more foreign fighters from not just the middle east and northern Africa but also the Americas, Europe and Asia, to travel, mostly via Turkey, to join its ranks in Syria. Turkey actively facilitated foreigners entering into the conflict zones in Syria in part because the government in Ankara had become convinced that the toppling of the regime in Syria was both possible and desirable.

After the *blitzkrieg* march of ISIS across northern Iraq, through Mosul and down the Tigris, cumulating with the declaration of the Caliphate on 29 June the flood of foreign fighters joining the ranks of ISIS became a raging torrent with at least 6,300 joining in July 2014 alone. It is estimated that by the end of 2017 more than 42,000 foreign fighters had joined its ranks. Around one quarter of this number came from surrounding Arab states and from Turkey, another quarter came from North Africa, and a further quarter from Europe, with the remaining quarter being drawn from Asia (Byman 2019).

The conflict in Afghanistan in which jihadi militias later aligned with al Qaeda – the organisation born out of the struggle to end the Soviet military occupation – were supported by foreign fighters, served as a kind of template for what happened in Syria and Iraq under JaN and ISIS. There were, however, a number of key differences. One is that the conflict in Afghanistan in the 1980s ‘only’ attracted around 4,000 or so foreign fight-

ers, most of whom saw very little frontline combat action. At least an equal number came later to train with al Qaeda. The intention had always been for them to go back home and take the jihad with them (Berger 2018; Byman 2019; Hegghamer 2020).

After al Baghdadi declared the founding of the Caliphate, and announced that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria would henceforth be known simply as The Islamic State, thousands from around the world were drawn to come and be part of this *imagined utopian project*. Unlike the case with al Qaeda in Afghanistan, they were not subject to elaborate screening processes and months of arduous religious instruction in military training (Berger 2018; Byman 2019; Wood 2018).

### *Southeast Asian Foreign Terrorist Fighters*

As has been discussed above, the phenomenon of foreign fighters leaving the comforts of home to join with their jihadi brothers on the battlefield is decades older than ISIS. The first significant recruitment of foreign fighters occurred in the 1980s, when Afghans were fighting Soviet military occupation in Afghanistan. The flow of foreign fighters to Afghanistan continued on after the Soviet withdrawal and only tailed-off after 1993.<sup>1</sup>

A second wave of foreign fighters, including many of those who had earlier travelled to Afghanistan, flocked to the conflict in Bosnia in the mid-1990s. And in the latter part of the 1990s, the conflict in Somalia drew many foreign fighters to join with groups like al-Shabaab. Most of the foreign fighters recruited to fight in Somalia were ethnic Somalis, of whom it is thought that as many as one million were living in diaspora communities around the world. A number of Australian Somalis were drawn to this conflict and in 2006, three were arrested because of their plans to carry out attacks in Australia after their attempts to travel to Somalia were thwarted.

Whilst it was clear in 2013 that Southeast Asians and Australians were being recruited to fight with ISIS in Syria it was only in 2014, however, that concerns intensified. One reason for increased concern was an aware-

---

1 In Southeast Asia the so-called “Afghan alumni” formed the leadership core of jihadi groups like Jemaah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf group. It is thought that around thirty Australians went to Afghanistan in the 1980s and early 1990s and that about twenty-four returned to Australia and continued involvement with extremist Islamist groups (Barton 2018a). Eight or nine individuals who travelled to Afghanistan from Australia became so extensively involved in Islamist extremism that they were arrested and prosecuted for the activity in subsequent years.

ness of the risk that Southeast Asians fighting in Syria or Iraq with groups like JaN or ISIS further radicalised through the foreign fighting experience, would return home hardened and with new combat skills (Barton 2018a).

The mindset of most foreign fighters from Southeast Asia, whom by late 2013 and 2014 were clearly aligned with either al Qaeda or ISIS – and overwhelmingly after the declaration of the caliphate – was that they were leaving their country of origin for good never to return. The romantic allure of joining the caliphate was as intoxicating as was the prospect in being involved in the apocalyptic conflict at the end of history. Consequently, irrespective of whether they became a martyr, which most welcomed, or lived to fight and serve the caliphate, few had any thoughts of ever returning to their country of origin (Byman 2019).

This had enormous bearing on the logistics of preparation for departure. Many, for example, took out personal bank loans or credit card withdrawals with no intention of ever repaying the money taken on credit. The journey of many younger travellers and most of the foreign fighters, who were in their twenties and increasingly in their teens, was facilitated by recruiters. These had not only indoctrinated and welcome them into an exclusive underground movement, but also had purchased airline tickets and made other logistical arrangements. Very often travel appears to have been paid for and facilitated by such predatory recruiters in these networks. Individuals thus could be moved in the space of just a few months or possibly less, to a point, where they accepted the offer of an air ticket and were prepared to go and join fighters in the Middle East (Kenney 2018).

In the past it was thought that radicalisation took a long period of time, as indeed the sort of radicalisation associated with groups like al Qaeda involved careful filtering of candidates and an intense focus on indoctrination. This appears to have differed greatly with IS, where the focus was on rapid building of trust and persuasion to leave home – to make *hijrah* – to join with the fighters in Syria and Iraq (Byman 2019; Kenny 2018, Zelin 2020).

### *An Outlook into the Region: Aceh, Thailand's Pattani insurgency and IS in the Philippines*

Whilst most terrorist movements appear to have their origins in *local* grievances and local struggles it is remarkably difficult to transform local grievances into becoming part of a *global* struggle. Very often attempts to flip local fighters over to a global cause fail. The Free Aceh Movement

(Gerakan Aceh Merdeka – GAM) is one case in point. The GAM insurgency on the north-western tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra rolled on for decades through the 1970s, 80s and 90s until the earthquake and tsunami of December 26, 2004 lead to a breakthrough that ultimately saw a brokered peace. For more than a decade Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and other globally-oriented terrorist groups attempted to gain traction in the Aceh, but failed completely. As late as 2010, JI and like-minded groups established a short-lived terrorist training camp in the province, but failed to understand how unwelcome their presence was to local conservative Islamic communities.

Whilst GAM framed its struggle as a defensive jihad, this understanding of the struggle came out of a conservative Muslim understanding from a very traditionalist culture which found the austere fundamentalism of Saudi-style Salafism to be a complete anathema. When outsiders come to your village and attempt to influence you to join their global struggle whilst simultaneously condemning your piety and declaring your understanding of Islam as being illegitimate and based on ignorance, then it is little wonder that they should fail to make converts to their cause!

The same dynamics continue today in the Pattani Malay deep south of Thailand. There, an ethno-nationalist insurgent conflict has also been continuing unabated for decades. As with the conflict in Aceh, the Pattani insurgency is very much about local identity in recognition of local rights, in this case the rights and identity of the Pattani ethnic Malay Muslims living as a small minority community on the southern fringes of Buddhist Thailand.

This is not to say, however, that there is no risk of the Pattani insurgents eventually finding common purpose in a global struggle led by al Qaeda, or IS, or some splinter group. The longer the conflict endures and local grievances remain unaddressed, the greater the danger that a generation of fighters will emerge, who can be persuaded to identify with a global insurgency.

This is very much what happened in the Caucasus, where Chechen and Dagestani insurgents pivoted quickly from fighting Russian forces in the name of local and ethnic identity to becoming enthusiastic and highly effective members of the global jihadi cause.

The situation, however, is very different in southern Philippines where in mid-2014 the notorious Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and three other militant groups joined forces to swear allegiance to IS. At the time, it looked like a branding exercise to help rebuild a sense of legitimacy lost after years of revealed criminal behaviour centred around kidnapping for ransom. By the time that Marawi, the largest Muslim city in the Philippines, was taken

in a siege by local militants acting in the name of IS on 23 May 2017, however, it became clear that the alliance with IS was a matter of real consequence.

The IS insurgents managed to retain control of the city for a full five months, effectively employing tactics and methods refined in urban warfare in Iraq. The siege saw more than 1,100 lives lost and a much larger number wounded. This included at least 980 suspected militants, of whom at least 44 were foreign nationals (Yusa 2018). The siege was only brought to an end by a combination of aggressive ground attacks, indiscriminate artillery bombardment, and even less discriminate aerial bombing. The result was a city physically destroyed and more than 1.1 million people displaced. To the present time, several hundred thousand people live in miserable conditions in IDP camps. Most of the inhabitants are unable to return home and the promised reconstruction of the city is yet to begin in earnest. It seems unlikely that the insurgents, who campaigned with considerable expertise, would have realistically expected to hold the city indefinitely. Consequently, it is reasonable to suppose that their actions were designed to provoke such a response, with urban destruction being leveraged to make the involved communities even more vulnerable to recruitment and radicalisation. The disciplined and effective way, in which the Islamists fought and maintained control of the city using pre-planted caches of weapons and supplies, suggests they are working towards a clear strategic end.

### *Discussion*

Radicalisation to the cause of the Islamic State movement in Western Europe has seen recruiters largely target second generation Muslim migrants. Personal alienation and a sense of not being accepted in broader society appear to have been bigger personal factors than unemployment or poverty, per se. Some al Qaeda networks figure in the recruitment networks but most of those radicalised do not appear to have had extensive prior association with Salafi-jihadi extremism.

In Southeast Asia, however, social networks linked to Salafi-jihadi movements earlier aligned with al Qaeda such as Jemaah Islamiyah, have played a dominant role. This has seen long-established extremist social networks lifted by the rising tide of IS. These reenergised networks and their spin-offs have played a key role in the recruitment of supporters and FTFs for IS. In this role, they have also benefited from the strength of the IS brand resulting in leaders and networks such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyri and Je-

maah Islamiyah gaining renewed legitimacy and prominence. This is true both for those elements of the JI extended network that have aligned with IS and for those elements that have remained aligned with al Qaeda, following it in supporting Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria when it split from ISIS.

The recruitment of FTF and other supporters, including women and children, has been a key focus for these reenergised violent extremist networks. But it has not been the only focus. Police in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia have been busy for the past two decades dealing with a very resilient domestic terrorist threat. In its first decade Indonesia's Detachment 88 has developed into one of the most effect counterterrorism forces in the world. It has been able to contain the threat of terrorism but unable to eliminate it.

In the wake of the declaration of the IS caliphate it has had to deal with new levels of intensity and ambition in domestic terrorist cells. Detachment 88 personnel have been able to intercept and interrupt the vast majority of terrorist plots but the successful family suicide bomb attacks on Churches in Surabaya in May 2018 revealed the nature of the challenges that they are facing. The cluster of attacks, which killed 28 and inured 57, were carried out by local cells of Jamaah Asharut Daulah (JAD) an umbrella network of more than twenty extremist groups supporting IS (Abuza and Clarke 2019; UNSC 2020). Most of the successful terrorist attacks in Indonesia over the decade have consisted of single actor attacks on police posts. The use of mothers and children in suicide attacks on churches marked a grim turning point. With travel to join the caliphate in the Middle East no longer possible, the tactics and techniques of IS terrorist attacks in the Middle East were imported to Southeast Asia.

The same pattern had occurred during the siege of Marawi twelve months earlier in Mindanao where urban warfare techniques from Raqqa and Mosul were employed in the largest Muslim city in the Philippines. Throughout all of the decades of insurgent and terrorist violence that the Philippines has endured suicide bombings have not featured until the arrival of IS. The siege of Marawi saw the techniques of IS imported to the Philippines. One year later, in July 2018, an explosives-packed van driven by a Moroccan IS FTF exploded at a security checkpoint in Lamitan, on the ASG island stronghold of Basilan, in the Sulu archipelago, to the west of Mindandao (Yusa 2018). Then in January 2019 a pair of suicide bombers launched a suicide bomb attack on the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, on the island Jolo, also in the Sulu archipelago, killing 22 and injuring over a 100.

In Malaysia authorities have been dealing with a proportionally similar level of terrorism threat to that facing the Indonesians. Special Branch of

the Royal Malaysian Police heads counterterrorism operations. Special Branch has interrupted at least 26 cells planning terrorism attacks and arrested of more than 519 terrorism suspects (as at July 2019).<sup>2</sup> Remarkably, 131 of those arrested on terrorism charges were foreigner nationals from 21 countries (with most coming from Indonesia and the Philippines).<sup>3</sup> And whilst Special Branch has so far managed to prevent any successful attacks within Malaysia it is significant that Malaysians have figured consistently in terrorist plots and attacks in Indonesia and in the Philippines. After the VBIED van attack on Basilan, for example, the bodies of six Malaysia FTFs were recovered from the wreckage.

### *Conclusion*

The reasons for the proportionally smaller number of FTFs joining the IS caliphate from Southeast Asia than from Western Europe remain unclear. What is clear though is that IS radicalisation in Southeast Asia has occurred largely through existing Salafi-jihadi extremist networks and has come on the top of decades of radicalisation to violent extremism in the name of jihad beginning well before the emergence of al Qaeda and IS. This pattern of radicalisation stretches back seven decades to the Dar'ul Islam movement in Indonesia and three decades ago saw an earlier wave of returning FTFs from the conflict in Afghanistan establish the JI network across Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia.

Clearly, IS radicalisation in Southeast Asia goes well beyond the outflow of FTF recruits to Syria and Iraq. The rise of the IS caliphate injected energy into extensive extremist networks, building on well-established groups and driving the evolution of new ones. In some cases, the demise of the IS caliphate and the closing-off of opportunities to join the IS struggle has seen radicalised Southeast Asians turn to local opportunities for jihad. It seems likely that the three JAD-families involved in the Surabaya attacks of May 2018, for example, would have attempted to join the caliphate in Syria and Iraq if that had been possible. And in the case of the suicide bombing of the cathedral on Jolo in January 2019 it was established that the attack was carried out by Rullie Rian Zeke and Ulfah Handayani Saleh, a husband and wife JAD team from Indonesia. The couple had travelled to Turkey with their three children in 2016 and attempted to cross into Syria

---

2 Chew. South China Morning Post, 18 June 2019.

3 Rodzi. Straits Times, 27 September 2019.

to join the caliphate but were repatriated to Indonesia by Turkish authorities in 2017 (Paddock and Gutierrez 2019).

The romantic, utopian, allure of traveling to join the IS caliphate in Syria and Iraq has exerted a powerful pull on both long-established extremists and the newly radicalised around the world. What is often overlooked, however, is that the core of the IS narrative is not simply a vision for a caliphate in the Middle East but rather for a global insurgency. In Southeast Asia, IS has successfully built on foundations laid by al Qaeda before it, to transform local grievances and regional conflicts and to integrate them, in the minds of true believers, into vital components of a global insurgency. And unlike the physical caliphate this project is set to endure, contributing to a living legacy of radicalisation for decades to come.

### References

- Abuza, Zachary and Clarke, Colin P. 2019. "The Islamic State Meets Southeast Asia: ISIS Seeks New Outposts Across the Indian Ocean". *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/southeast-asia/2019-09-16/islamic-state-meets-southeast-asia>).
- Azman, Nur Aziemah Azman and Arianti, V. 2019. "The IS Threat in Indonesia". *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 19 September 2019, 11(7): 1-5.
- Barton, Greg. 1997. "The Origins of Islamic Liberalism in Indonesia and its Contribution to Democratisation". *Democracy in Asia*, pp. 427-51. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Barton, Greg. 2002. *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President – A View from the Inside*. Sydney and Honolulu: UNSW Press and University of Hawaii Press.
- Barton, Greg. 2004. *Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah and radical Islamism*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Barton, Greg. 2009. "The historical development of Jihadi Islamist thought in Indonesia". In: Helfstein, Scott, ed. *Radical Islamic Ideology in Southeast Asia*. New York: The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.
- Barton, Greg. 2010. "Indonesia". In: Rubin, Barry, ed. *Guide to Islamist Movements*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Barton, Greg. 2015. "Islamic State, Radicalisation and the Recruitment of Foreign Fighters in Australia: Making Hijrah from Lucky Country to God's Nation". In: Echle, Christian et al. *From Desert to World Cities – The New Terrorism*. Panorama. Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.
- Barton, Greg. 2018a. "The evolution of modern terrorism". In: Ireland, Jane, ed. *International Handbook on Aggression*. London: Routledge.



- Barton, Greg. 2018b. "How Indonesia's Counter-Terrorism Force Has Become a Model for the Region". *The Conversation*, 2 July 2018. (<https://theconversation.com/how-indonesias-counter-terrorism-force-has-become-a-model-for-the-region-97368>).
- Barton, Greg. 2020. "Salafist-Jihadism in Southeast Asia". In: Kfir, Issac and Coyne, John. *ASPI Counterterrorism Yearbook 2020*, pp. 43-51. Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute.
- Berger, J.M. 2018. *Extremism*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Borum, Randy. 2011. "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories". *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4:4 (Winter 2011): 7-36.
- Botha, Anneli. 2014. "Political Socialization and Terrorist Radicalization Among Individuals Who Joined al-Shabaab in Kenya". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37 (11) (2014): 895-919.
- Byman, Daniel. 2019. *Road Warriors: Foreign Fighter in the Armies of Jihad*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chalk, Peter. 2019. "Jemaah Islamiyah: An Uncertain Future". *ASPI*, Canberra, 21 March 2019.
- Chew, Amy. 2019. "Top Malaysian Police Officer Warns of Suicide Attacks as Isis Fighters Return Home". *South China Morning Post*, 18 June 2019.
- Cockburn, Patrick. 2015. *The Rise of the Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*. London: Verso.
- Cook, Joana and Vale, Gina. 2018. *From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation.
- Cribb, R. and Gie, Sow Hok. 1990. "The mass killings in Bali". In: Cribb, R., ed. *The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966*. Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies. Monash Papers on Southeast Asia - No. 21: 241-260.
- Elegant, S. 2001. "Indonesia's Dirty Little Holy War". *Time*, 17 December 2001.
- Elson, R. E. 2001. *Subarto, A Political Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fishman, Brian. 2016. *The Master Plan: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gerges, Fawaz. 2016. *A History of ISIS*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hefner, R.W. 2000. *Civil Islam, Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Hegghammer, Thomas. 2020. *The Caravan: Abdullah Azzam and the Rise of the Global Jihad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ICG Asia Repor. 2003. "Jemaah Islamiyah in South East Asia: Damaged but Still Dangerous". *ICG Asia Report No. 63*, 26 August 2003.
- Ilardi, Gaetano Joe. 2013. "Interviews With Canadian Radicals". *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36 (9) (2013): 713-738.

- Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC). 2017. "The re-emergence of Jemaah Islamiyah". *IPAC Report*, No. 36, 27 April 2017. ([http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2017/04/IPAC\\_Report\\_36.pdf](http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2017/04/IPAC_Report_36.pdf)).
- International Crisis Group (ICG). 2002., "Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia: The Case of the 'Ngruki Network' in Indonesia". *ICG Asia Briefing*, 8 August 2002.
- Kenney, Michael. 2018. *The Islamic State in Britain: Radicalization and Resilience in an Activist Network*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kersten, Carool. 2015. *Islam in Indonesia. The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values*. London: Hurst.
- Kfir, Issac. 2018. *Terrorism in the Indo-Pacific: Glocalism Comes of Age*. ASPI Special Report. Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 22 May 2018.
- Manne, Robert. 2016. *The Mind of the Islamic State*. Melbourne: Redback (Schwarz Publishing).
- McCants, William. 2015a. *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- McCants, William. 2015b. *The Believer: How an Introvert With a Passion for Religion and Soccer Became Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, Leader Of The Islamic State*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution.
- McDonald, Kevin. 2018. *Radicalization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Neumann, Peter. 2013. "The Trouble with Radicalization". *International Affairs* 89 (4) (2013): 873-893.
- Nilsson, Marco. 2015. "Foreign Fighters and the Radicalization of Local Jihad: Interview Evidence from Swedish Jihadists". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38 (5) (2015): 343-358.
- Noorhaidi, H. 2006. *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia*. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.
- Paddock, Richard C. and Gutierrez, Jason. 2019. "Indonesian Couple Carried out Philippines Cathedral Bombing, Police Say". *New York Times*, 23 July 2019.
- Porter, Louise and Kebbell, Mark. 2011. "Radicalization in Australia: Examining Australia's Convicted Terrorists". *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 18 (2) (2011): 212-231.
- Rodzi, Nadirah H. 2019. "16 Terror Suspects Nabbed in Malaysia". *Straits Times*, 27 September 2019.
- Sedgwick, Mark. 2010. "The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion". *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22 (4) (2010): 479-494.
- Sholeh, B. 2006. *Jihad in Maluku*. In: Tan, Andrew T.H., ed. *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, pp. 152-154. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Solahudin. 2013. *The Roots of Terrorism in Indonesia: From Darul Islam to Jema'ah Islamiyah*. Sydney: New South Publishing.
- Stern, Jessica and Berger, J.M. 2015. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Ecco, Harper Collins.

- United Nations Security Council (UNSC). 2020. "Jamaah Ansharut Daulah". (<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/jamaah-ansharut-daulah>). Accessed 16 April 2020.
- Vergani, Matteo; Iqbal, Muhammad; Ilbahar, Ekin and Barton, Greg. 2018. "The Three Ps of Radicalization: Push, Pull and Personal. A Systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence about Radicalization into Violent Extremism". *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*.
- Warrick, Joby. 2015. *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*. London: Transworld Publishers.
- Wasserstein, David. 2017. *Black Banners of ISIS: The Roots of the New Caliphate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Weiss, Michael and Hassan, Hassan. 2016. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York: Regan Arts.
- Wood, Graham. 2018. *The Way of the Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State*. London: Penguin Random House UK.
- Yassin-Kassab, Robin and al-Shami, Leila. 2016. *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War*. London: Pluto Books.
- Yusa, Zam. 2018. "Six Malaysians Were Involved in Basilan Suicide Bomb Plot, Expert Says". *The Defense Post*, 24 December 2018.
- Zelin, Aaron. 2020. *Your Sons Are at Your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad*. New York: Columbia University Press.



# Radicalisation in South Asia: Left, Right and Secular

*D. Suba Chandran*

## *Introduction*

South Asia, the region on the Indian subcontinent, which reaches from Afghanistan in the west to Bangladesh in the east, and from Nepal in the north to Sri Lanka in the south, has gained the image of a home to religious fanatics. Islamist groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan in particular, but also more recently the rise of Hindu nationalists in India and Buddhist radicals in Sri Lanka, have contributed to the notion that violence in the region is motivated by religion. This image, furthered by the focus of terrorism research during the post-9/11 period, which particularly looked at religious radicalisation in the region, was reinforced by the recent Islamist terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka in April 2019. Violence in South Asia, however, is not solely a religious phenomenon.

Already before 9/11, large scale violence was perpetrated by left-wing extremists, like the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in Sri Lanka in the 1970s or the Maoists in Nepal during the late 1990s, led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Similarly, caste violence has shaped the post-independence history of the region, not only, but particularly in India. Today, *organised* violence against women has gained in prominence in the region, too. Thus, to think of South Asian violence only in terms of religion neglects the diversity of ideological and ideational backgrounds to violent actions.

This paper seeks to provide an overview of different cases of violence in South Asia. The paper argues that the range of phenomena is wide and diverse, but that what is common to the collective actors behind the violence is their usage of violence as a means towards a political or societal end. The paper will show that although there are diverse factors driving individuals to join or support violent activities, the underlying rationale is the political and/or societal endgame. Moreover, it is argued that the reasons for violence are multi-layered and cannot be understood by focusing on one driver only. Violence here is considered a tool implemented by an agent who aims at undermining the status quo and in order to impose a new order,

irrespective of what ideological or religious background this political aim have.

### *Left-Wing Violence in South Asia*

Three of the more prominent cases, in which left-wing groups are responsible for the perpetration of large scale violence in South Asia, are the Indian Naxalites, Nepali Maoists and Sri Lanka's Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). In these cases, the groups aimed to overthrow the state violently by revolution, and to create a new state and society based on their respective understanding of them.

In India, left-wing extremism, referred to as the "Naxal movement" developed in phases since the country's independence (Banerjee 2008; Mukherji 2012; Raghavan 2011; Singh 2016). The Naxal violence has emerged in its first major phase in West Bengal, with "Naxalbari" as the core of its activities, from which it received the name *Naxalites* (Banerjee 2002:2115-16). In a second phase, the violent movement extended its reach to Andra Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand; and in a third phase, which is still continuing, the movement expanded and concentrated in primarily two Indian States, Orissa and Chhattisgarh (Bhatia 2005). For their "peoples war", the *Naxalites* build on Marxist slogans and primarily mobilise educated youths from the urban areas. However, its attraction not only derives from the Marxist ideology. The movement was able to draw on local issues to gain support from individuals other than the educated urban youths. As such, it drew on slogans of caste oppression in Bihar and Jharkhand, aiming to involve members of the Dalit community, and took up concerns of tribal communities in Orissa and Chhattisgarh (Bhatia 2005). The endgame of the Naxalites in each state, however, was nothing less than the fundamental transformation of state and society.

The aim to fundamentally transform state and society along the lines of Marxism was not limited to South Asia's territorially and population-wise largest state, India. In India's southern neighbour-state, Sri Lanka, the influence of Marxist ideas about the change of society and economy by revolutionary means, too, took its toll. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) thereby formed the forefront of left-wing violence. The large scale left-wing violence perpetrated by the JVP and its supporters took place mainly in two phases, and manifested in two insurgencies of which the first started in 1971 and the second took place in 1987-89 (Venugopal 2010). According to Matthews, the founder of the JVP, Rohana Wijeweera "espoused a curious mixture of Marxism and Sinhalese ethnic chauvinism"

(1989a:312). For Matthews, “the JVP’s deepest motive was to seize power by any means, even if it meant playing on the misguided ethnic loyalties of the Sinhalese” (ibid.). For Moore, the “means the JVP used in pursuit of state power were shaped by and adapted to the environment – the economic, educational and occupational structures, demography and human geography – of the Sinhalese areas of Sri Lanka to which the JVP was confined” (1993:594). The JVP-led violence was only ended by uncompromising violence applied by the Sri Lankan state.

Also to India’s north, in Nepal, left-wing violence was applied as means towards the Maoists’ endgame of overthrowing the monarchy and Nepali state. The aim here was creating a socialist republic. In Nepal, left-wing violence was largely perpetrated during the late 1990s and the early 2000s by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), popularly referred to as the Nepali Maoists (Crisis Group 2005). The Maoists’ means of changing the regime was an armed struggle, referred to as ‘People’s War’. According to Verma and Navlakha, “In Maoist understanding, People’s War is 80 per cent politics and 20 per cent warfare. The decisive factor in a war of this genre [are] not guns but the mobilization of people for seizing power through protracted war” (2007:1839). After fighting the Nepal military for a decade, the Maoists signed a peace agreement in 2008 with the government of Nepal and agreed to take part in the electoral politics. Subsequently, Nepal’s Maoists came overboard and took part in the elections. Finally, in the 2008 elections or the National Constituent Assembly the party won around 38 per cent of the seats and formed the government. While the Maoists’ violence has resulted in the transformation of the state, it has not brought about the society claimed to have been envisioned.

Despite these violent campaigns with a clear Marxist or Maoist ideology, other violent movements in the region have drawn and continue to draw on Marxism, despite a stated and clearly proclaimed ethnically grounded agenda. This has been the case with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, but also with the Baloch insurgency during the 1960s-70s in Pakistan. Personal networks and relations have furthered the ideological relation to the left-wing globally. Especially the Marri tribes of Balochistan are considered to have been close to Moscow. The chief of the Marri tribe, Nawab Khair Baksh Marri,<sup>1</sup> for example, took refuge in Kabul in 1979 and also his sons were sent to Moscow for education (Tahir 2008).

---

1 According to Tahir (2008\*), “Khair Bakhsh Marri remains committed to an armed struggle for no less than full independence for Balochistan despite losing dozens of

*Strategic Violence against Women in South Asia*

While domestic violence against women is neither a South Asian particularity, nor a new phenomenon but rather can be traced back for centuries, one finds that violence against women currently has reached a new political dimension. Political and societal support for violence against women as means to retain a patriarchal order can be found throughout South Asian societies. Most prominently, however, India and Pakistan serve as cases in point.

The local support for the brutal killings or physical abuse of women in the name of a caste or religion in Pakistan and India thereby not only cuts across provinces, but also religious or caste identities.

While some of the stories of the killing of women in this context have hit the news from Punjab in Pakistan to Tamil Nadu in India, many have never been reported. And yet, many examples can be given. Qandeel Baloch, an outspoken young model, was killed by her brother for bringing a bad reputation to the family in Multan in Pakistan. Saba Qaiser in Gujranwala in Pakistan was shot by her father, stuffed in a bag and dropped into a river, for marrying a person of her own choice. Muktaran Mai in Meerawala, Pakistan, was gang-raped on the orders of a local panchayat, as she stood up and spoke against the elders who wanted to bury the case of her brother getting sodomised.

While the above cases may be considered as individual crimes, what makes them significant in the context of this essay is the larger societal response to these killings. Many people in Pakistan supported the family, who killed Qandeel Baloch, for dishonouring the family values.<sup>2</sup> Many of the victims, should they survive are forced to forgive the perpetrators of violence against them. Even in the brutal case of Saba Qaiser – to recall, she was shot, stuffed in a bag and thrown into a river by her own father – Qaiser was forced by the rest of her family to forgive her father to prevent a formal case against him. Despite the wide attention this case got, among others due to the film that covered the story, the societal response was not the sympathy for the female victim, but the rejection of the treatment of the issue. When the documentary titled “A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness” on Saba Qaiser’s case, directed by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, won an Oscar, a section of the society in Pakistan went after the director

---

followers and relatives, most recently his son Balach Marri, who reportedly led a rebel group of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)”.

2 Shamsi. BBC, 16 July 2016.



for creating a bad name for the country. While responding to a question in the US on the crime against Muktaran Mai – a gang-rape ordered by a local panchayat – Pervez Musharraf, the then President of Pakistan said: “You must understand the environment in Pakistan...This has become a money-making concern. A lot of people say if you want to go abroad and get a visa for Canada or citizenship and be a millionaire, get yourself raped”.<sup>3</sup> Even more, Muktaran was prevented from visiting the US. The government thought it would bring a bad reputation to Pakistan, and kidnapped her.<sup>4</sup>

The issue in the context of this chapter is less the *individual* decision to kill a female family member. It is the *collective* reaction ranging from society to the state to tolerate, accept or even support and promote the violence against women, who do not conform to the societal expectations for them. The question is thus not only why families kill their members, but even more, why a section within the rest of the immediate society – whether in the form of jirga or caste or religious groups – support the actions of these individuals and families. Looking at many of the responses and public statements in this regard, the answer to the question might be found in the intention to retain or (re-)create an ‘ideal’ society and, most notably, to put women in their ‘right’ place therein.

### *Religion and Violence in South Asia*

Despite the diversity of violence, religious violence is a prominent feature of the politics in South Asia. However, not only purely religious issues promote the usage of violence, but also economic aims of individuals involved.

Haqqani (2006\*) points out that “religious, political parties have been a part of Pakistan’s political scene since its inception. As the Pakistani State increasingly adopted an Islamic identity, sectarian differences and theological arguments led to the formation of sectarian political movements. The slogan ‘Islam in Danger’ was widely used during the campaign for Pakistan’s creation, and it remained a powerful rallying cry for religion-based politics. Even secular civilian and military leaders found it expedient to argue, from time to time, that the nation must mobilize to fend off threats to Islam or to Pakistan’s Islamic ideology”.

---

3 Kristof. New York Times, 25 January 2020.

4 Ibid.

This phenomenon in Pakistan manifested itself soon after independence not only in attacks on religious minorities, but also on those members of the Muslim community, not considered to be true Muslims. The anti-Ahmadi riots in the early 1950s are but one example. Though the Ahmadiya community considers itself as Muslim, the majority Sunni population rejects this claim. On this basis, the first major communal riot in independent Pakistan took place in 1953 against the Ahmadiya community, which became the target of these riots, that took place primarily in Lahore. Even a constitutional amendment passed in 1974 under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto considers the Ahmadiya as non-Muslims (Khan 2015).

Next to sectarian differences and claims of exclusivity, drivers to join violent groups claiming religious causes, however, include also economic ones. In the Jhang district of Punjab in Pakistan, the feudal lords of the region were Shias, whereas the majority of the peasants were Sunnis. The oppressive relationship between the feudal lords and peasants – which is economic in nature – assumed a religious identity for standing, the overcoming of which furthered Sunni violence against the Shia feudal lords. According to Ali, “The sectarian differences notwithstanding, the socio-political context of Jhang was such that the only way to break the dominance of the Shia feudal lords was to play on anti-Shia sentiment. To confront feudalism directly was next to impossible, in view of the fact that the majority of the population took it as something natural, about which they could not do anything. On the other hand, it was easier to mobilize them in the name of Islam, which had always been very close to their heart, even for those who were otherwise not very religious” (Ali 1999\*).

Similarly, in the Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu in India, one could see an economic motivation behind religious radicalisation. One of the big cities in Tamil Nadu (and in South India), Coimbatore has been known for its cosmopolitan nature, and was frequently referred to as the business city. During recent years, there has been evidence of radicalisation – of both the communities – Hindu and Muslim. According to Rajamohan (2006\*), “Economic rivalry between Hindu and Muslim traders is another major reason for the growth of fundamentalist organizations in Tamil Nadu. Since 1991, Coimbatore, a city with a substantial high-tech industrial infrastructure, has seen a translation of economic competition into fundamentalist confrontation. The business community uses these hardliners for their own economic and political benefits. It is much more prevalent in the small scale business enterprises which are active in the common Bazaars. For instance, the considerable textile industry in the city is organized along communal lines, and there is little cooperation, collaboration or interdependence between Hindu and Muslim textile traders”.

As such violence in the name of religion appears, at times, to feature economic interests. Local economic rivalry gets exploited politically by right-wing groups on both sides of the religious divide. The presence of right-wing groups then in turn gets exploited by the businessmen – to either target the other, or to get protected by the former. Rajamohan refers to a police account and writes “when the Hindu Munnani posed a threat to their businesses, Muslim businessmen nurtured Basha, who began his career as a footpath trader in the Ukkadam and Oppanakkara areas. When the sequence of stabbings and counter-stabbings intensified, youth on either side of the divide joined the Hindu Munnani or Al-Ummah, leading to increasing communal polarization” (Rajamohan 2006\*).

However, is notable that economic grievances, like unemployment or lack of education, or economic interests can neither be seen as the major driver of joining a violent group or movement.

The attackers of the Easter Sunday attacks on 21 April 2019 in Colombo have been identified and their background well analysed. Three hotels and churches in Colombo were targeted by suicide bombers on 21 April 2019, when the city was celebrating the Easter Sunday. More than 250 people were killed during these multiple attacks on that day, carried out by the members of a radical group – the National Thowheeth Jamat (Amarasingam 2019). An initial report of the New York Times (2019) quoting the officials mentioned the following: “The suicide bombers who struck churches and hotels were all well-educated, middle-class Sri Lankans”.<sup>5</sup> Two of the suicide bombers, who were a part of the nine members team that perpetrated the attacks, came from a wealthy family.<sup>6</sup> One report referred them as the “millionaire brothers”.<sup>7</sup> According to Srinivasan, “Is-hana Exports is a nearly three decade-old spice export company. Its founder Y.M. Ibrahim is widely known as a millionaire with modest beginnings, and an ever-ready philanthropist. He has friends of all political hues, and they all respect him. In natural course, his sons would have inherited his business, fortune, and possibly all that goodwill. Instead, they chose to become suicide bombers”.<sup>8</sup>

A similar trend manifests itself in an earlier attack in Dhaka in July 2016. On 1 July 2016, six young militants, armed with crude bombs and guns, took hostage of a bakery in Dhaka. It ended up in killing 29 people;

---

5 New York Times, 24 April 2019.

6 Gettleman et al. New York Times, 27 April 2019.

7 Srinivasan. The Hindu, 25 May 2019.

8 Ibid.

20 were hostages (18 foreigners from Japan, Italy and the US, and two from Bangladesh), two were police officers, and two were from the bakery.<sup>9</sup> According to a New York Times report on the identity of the attackers, “the men, all in their late teens or early 20s, were products of Bangladesh’s elite, several having attended one of the country’s top English-medium private schools as well as universities both in the country and abroad”.<sup>10</sup> The report also quotes a local source claiming: “That’s what we’re absolutely riveted by... That these kids from very affluent families with no material want can still be turned to this kind of ideology, motivated not just to the point of killing but also want to be killed”.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Glocal and Violence*

While political aims underlying violence can arise from the local cultural, economic and religious conditions, external ideologies and ideas promoted by international radical groups need to be considered as drivers of radicalisation in South Asia. Radical Salafi-Wahabi ideologies as well as the ideas promoted by organisations such as the al Qaeda and ISIS, are considered as such<sup>12</sup> – but also Marxist or Maoist ideologies are a case in point. And yet, the mere introduction of these ideas does not suffice to translate them into political aims in the South Asian context for whose achievement individuals are willing to perpetrate violence.

The process could be explained through franchise and franchisee model (Chandran 2011). Like any international franchise would want regional franchisees, the strategic aims of transnational organisations such as IS or al Qaeda seek to expand their area of influence. Regional political interests, in turn, would find global symbols attractive and seek to become part of an international chain or network. As such, one could quickly identify the interests of the Middle Eastern organisations and states in exporting Salafi-Wahabi ideology, not only into South Asia, but also into Southeast and Central Asia, and even beyond.

At the same time, local groups and organisations are willing to join global movements to gain from prestige, knowledge, resources and support. For example, a group of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that was

---

<sup>9</sup> New York Times, 3 July 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Manik and Anand. New York Times, 3 July 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

fighting the State in Pakistan and which owed its allegiance to Mullah Omar of the Taliban, in January 2015, announced its allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>13</sup> Earlier in 2014, according to a news report, “six top commanders of the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, including spokesman Shahidullah Shahid” announced their allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi of the Islamic State.<sup>14</sup> The report referred to Shahid saying, “I am confirming my allegiance to Amirul Momineen Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and would abide by all his decisions, whatever is the order, and whatsoever the circumstances, I shall be loyal to him and obey his orders”.<sup>15</sup>

### *Violence Itself a Driver of Violence*

The role of minority-majority relations in the escalation of contention into violence is frequently disputed. Thereby it is difficult to argue for the fault of the one about the other, as violence is frequently the result of escalation.

In India, the demolition of the Babri Masjid took place in 1992; the demolition was led by right-wing Hindu militant organisations, led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a radical right-wing group. Lochtefeld pointed out how the demolition triggered a wave of communal violence in India (1994:587-602).

In Sri Lanka, the majoritarian violence against the Tamils started during the 1980s itself. July 1983 witnessed a significant riot across the country against the Sri Lankan Tamils. Later in 1987, there were riots again, primarily in the eastern province of Trincomalee. Tamil and Sinhala violence furthered the motivation to join violent movements.

### *Conclusion: The Endgame behind Violence in South Asia*

The paper has presented an overview over different violent groups and movements in South Asia. It has shown that the aiming at changing or preserving a social or political order matters in all cases, suggesting violence to be a means towards an end. It was shown that the formation of political aims is not limited to religious backgrounds and that individual's reasons for participating in violence or violent organisations may vary.

---

13 Dawn, 11 January 2015.

14 Dawn, 14 October 2014.

15 Ibid.

References

\* in the text denotes a non-newspaper online source for a given quote, for which no page numbers can be provided.

- Ali, Mukhtar Ahmad. 1999. "Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang". *RCSS Policy Studies*, 9, Colombo. ([https://www.rcss.org/publication/policy\\_paper/RCSS%20Policy%20Studies%209.pdf](https://www.rcss.org/publication/policy_paper/RCSS%20Policy%20Studies%209.pdf)). Accessed 17 April 2020.
- Amarasingam, Amarnath. 2019. "Terrorism on the Teardrop Island: Understanding the Easter 2019 Attacks in Sri Lanka". *CTC Sentinel*, 12 (5). (<https://ctc.usma.edu/terrorism-teardrop-island-understanding-easter-2019-attacks-sri-lanka/>). Accessed 15 January 2020.
- Banerjee, Sumanta. 2002. "Naxalbari: Between Past and Future". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37 (22): 2115-16.
- Banerjee, Sumanta. 2008. *India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising*. New Delhi: Zed Books.
- Bhatia, Bela. 2005. "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40 (15): 1536-49.
- Chandran, D Suba. 2011. "Ten Years After: 'Terror Franchisees' as an Evolving Phenomenon". *IPCS*, 26 September 2011. ([http://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=3463](http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=3463)). Accessed 24 December 2019.
- Crisis Group. 2005. "Nepal's Maoists: Their Aims, Structure and Strategy". *Crisis Group*, Report 104. (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/nepal/nepals-maoists-their-aims-structure-and-strategy>). Accessed 15 January 2020.
- Dawn. 2014. "Six top TTP commanders announce allegiance to Islamic State's Baghdadi". *Dawn*, 14 October 2014. (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1137908>). Accessed 12 April 2020.
- Dawn. 2015. "Ex-TTP members pledge allegiance to Islamic State". 11 January 2015. (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1156376>). Accessed 12 April 2020.
- Gettleman, Jeffrey; Schultz, Kai; Mashal, Mujib and Goldman, Russell. 2019. "Two Super-Rich Families Ended Up on Opposite Sides of Easter Attacks". *New York Times*, 27 April 2019. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/27/world/asia/sri-lanka-attacks-wealthy.html>). Accessed 4 February 2020.
- Haqqani, Husain. 2006. "Weeding Out the Heretics: Sectarianism in Pakistan". *Hudson*. (<https://www.hudson.org/research/9769-weeding-out-the-heretics-sectarianism-in-pakistan>). Accessed 12 April 2020.
- Khan, Adil Hussain. 2015. *From Sufism to Ahmadiyya: A Muslim Minority Movement in South Asia*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Kristof, Nicholas D. 2005. "Lining Up to Be Raped?". *New York Times*, 20 September 2005. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/20/opinion/lining-up-to-be-raped.html>). Accessed 25 January 2020.
- Lochtefeld, James G. 1994. "The Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Roots of Hindu Militancy". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62 (2): 587-602.

- Manik, Julfikar Ali and Anand, Geeta. 2016. "After Slaughter, Bangladesh Reels at Revelations About Attackers". *New York Times*, 3 July 2016. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/asia/bangladesh-dhaka-terrorism.html>). Accessed 5 February 2020.
- Matthews, Bruce. 1989a. "The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the Politics of the Underground in Sri Lanka". *The Round Table*, 78.
- Matthews, Bruce. 1989b. "Sri Lanka in 1989: Peril and Good Luck". *Asian Survey*, 30 (2): 144-149.
- Moore, Mick. 1993. "Thoroughly Modern Revolutionaries: The JVP in Sri Lanka". *Modern Asian Studies*, 27 (3).
- Mukherji, Nirmalangshu. 2012. *The Maoists in India: Tribals Under Siege*. New Delhi: Pluto Press.
- New York Times. 2016. "Dhaka Victims Were a Diverse Group of Global Citizens". 3 July 2016. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/asia/dhaka-victims-we-re-a-diverse-group-of-global-citizens.html>). Accessed 12 April 2020.
- New York Times. 2019. "Sri Lanka Attacks: What We Know and Don't Know". 24 April 2019. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/world/asia/sri-lanka-easter-bombing-attacks.html>). Accessed 12 April 2020.
- New York Times. 2019. "Sri Lanka Attacks: What We Know and Don't Know". 24 April 2019. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/world/asia/sri-lanka-easter-bombing-attacks.html>). Accessed 3 February 2020.
- Raghavan, V.R. 2011. *The Naxal Threat: Causes, State Responses and Consequences*. New Delhi: VIJ Books.
- Rajamohan, P.G. 2006. "Tamil Nadu: The Rise of Islamist Fundamentalism". *Faultlines*, 16. (<https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume16/Article5.htm>). Accessed 12 April 2020.
- Shamsi, Amber Rahim. 2016. "Qandeel Baloch: How Her Murder Reflects a Divided Country". *BBC*, 16 July 2016. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36815808>). Accessed 25 January 2020.
- Singh, Prakash. 2016. *The Naxalite Movement in India*. New Delhi: Rupa.
- Srinivasan, Meera. 2019. "The Inside Story of the 9 Suicide Bombers Behind Sri Lanka's Savage Easter Attacks". *The Hindu*, 25 May 2019. (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/the-inside-story-of-the-9-suicide-bombers-behind-sri-lanka-savage-easter-attacks/article27236216.ece/amp/>). Accessed 29 March 2020.
- Tahir, Muhammad Tahir. 2008. "Tribes and Rebels: The Players in the Balochistan Insurgency". *Terrorism Monitor*, 6 (7). (<https://jamestown.org/program/tribes-and-rebels-the-players-in-the-balochistan-insurgency>). Accessed 29 March 2020.
- Venugopal, Rajesh. 2010. "Sectarian Socialism: The Politics of Sri Lanka's Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)". *Modern Asian Studies*, 44 (3): 567-602.
- Verma, Anand Swaroop and Navlakha, Gautam. 2007. "People's War in Nepal: Genesis and Development". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42 (20).





# Chapter III

## The Global and the Local



# Trends of Contemporary Terrorism in Pakistan

*Khuram Iqbal*

## *Introduction*

During the last seven years, the incidents of terrorism in Pakistan have witnessed a downward trend, however, the threat of violence persists. In 2018, the country experienced approximately 262 attacks resulting in 595 casualties. Contemporary terrorism in the country, although far less intense and frequent than what it used to be almost a decade ago, is multifaceted with a number of groups subscribing to different ideologies and striking the different sets of targets in pursuit of their competing political objectives. To make sense of this complex threat landscape, I classify terrorist groups operating in or from Pakistan into four different categories; neo-jihadis (al Qaeda, TTP, IS), ethno-nationalists (Baloch Liberation Army, Balochistan Liberation Front, Sindhu-Desh Liberation Army), sectarian (Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Muhammad, Zainabyoon) and religious nationalists (Jammat-u-Dawah, Jaish-e-Muhammad). During the last one decade, Islamabad has adopted different sets of tools to counter these groups and a significant decline in frequency and intensity of terrorist attacks in the country followed. Whereas the government relied on extensive use of military force to eliminate neo-jihadi and sectarian organisations, it adopted an entirely different strategy to deal with the groups falling in the religious nationalist category. Resultantly, TTP and its allies struggled for survival after losing key infrastructure and leadership, sectarian outfits forced to seek external collaborators for their survival and JuD opted to transform into a political party, contesting the 2018 general elections of Pakistan under the banner of Milli Muslim League. While there has been a significant change in repertoire, there is a genuine fear that regional developments can reverse the trend by providing these groups new ideological impetus.

The chapter hypothesises that changes in the local, regional and global framework impact changes in the Pakistani terrorist organisations' likelihood to apply violence as political tool. Changing the framework for action affects changes in the likely usage of non-violent or violent means. I will point out that regional political developments, such as the possible withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, military escalation on the

issue of Iran and enhanced Chinese presence positively influences these organisations' abilities to recuperate ideologically and operationally from battlefield losses since 2013. Thereafter, I will show how the government's de-radicalisation and counter-terrorism measures might impact the framework conditions of violent groups for the application of strategic violence.

In the course of the paper, I will therefore look specifically into the following questions: How have country-wide anti-terrorism campaigns impacted terrorist organisations falling in neo-jihadist, religious-nationalist, sectarian and ethno-nationalist categories since 2013? How might the proposed withdrawal of foreign forces impact TTP, ISIS and al Qaeda? How likely are Shia militant outfits, such as Zainaboon and Sipah-e-Muhammad, to respond to any military confrontation involving Iran? What are the challenges and prospects of mainstreaming Jamat-u-Dawah?

The paper draws on secondary sources and is based on a collection of data on active terrorist organisations in Pakistan. These sources include organisational publications in print and digital forms collected by the author over a period of last ten years.<sup>1</sup> Archives maintained by different national and non-governmental research institutions, too, were consulted for gathering news updates relevant to the research topic. The results presented in this paper are based on the author's interpretation of the events reported in the sources mentioned above, and his extrapolation of motivations and strategic considerations of the respective group and organisation.

### *Complex Threat Landscape*

From 2004 onwards, Pakistan waged a sustained campaign to fight terrorism that damaged the physical and ideological composition of some of the most destructive terrorist organisations, such as al Qaeda, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and of lately Islamic State (IS). The country needed to confront a multi-frontal assault by terrorists of different hue and colours pur-

---

1 These sources include but are not limited to all issues of *Ahya-e-Khilafat* (Restoration of Caliphate), the flagship monthly magazine of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. Mufti Abu Masood Hasham, *Jihad-e-Pakistan* (Jamea Hafsa Forum 2010). 'An Interview with Hakeemullah Mehsud and Mufti Wali-u-Rehman', Omar Media, Central Broadcasting Unit of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, 20 January 2012. 'Karwan-e-Fidayan' (Caravan of Self-sacrificing holy warriors), Video released by Omar Studio, official media wing of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. 'Obtaining Parents' Permission to Participate in Jihad', Online Islam. 'Question and Answer Session with Mufti Abu Zar', Jamea Hafsa Forum (Online).

suining different sets of goals. In erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), transnational jihadists challenged the state, Balochistan was plagued with an ethno-nationalist insurgency, and the mainland was to bear the brunt of a lethal nexus between sectarian and transnational Islamist outfits. Karachi, the country's financial hub, was hit by all four distinct waves of terrorism. These non-state actors often competed for influence and resources and occasionally cooperated against a common enemy, i.e. the state and society of Pakistan. For instance, attacks claimed by ISIS in Pakistan involved significant operational support by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Similarly, in 2014 TTP approached Baloch separatists in Karachi to establish a joint front. Despite this overlapping, a simplistic view continues to prevail<sup>2</sup> that often revolves around single-factor explanation of the phenomenon conveniently ignoring how multiple factors, such as the role of state, society and regional geo-politics interact with each other at different levels to pave the way for violent and non-violent variants of extremism.<sup>3</sup>

To develop a systematic understanding of terrorism in Pakistan we can classify multiple violent organisation in four broad categories: (1) Neo-Jihadists, (2) Sectarian, (3) Ethno-Nationalist and (4) Religious Nationalists. The following section explains these categories, why they are termed as such, how groups falling in each category differ from others, how the state has dealt with them, what have been the outcomes and how developments abroad will shape the future of these terrorist organisations.

### *Neo Jihadists*

In this category we include Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (the organisation responsible for more than 70 per cent terrorist attacks in Pakistan during last decade), its affiliates (local groups including Punjabi Taliban, Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi etc, and international groups including al Qaeda, East Turkistan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Jund-ul-Khalifa etc), breakaway factions (Jamat-ul-Ahrar, Hizb-ul-Ahrar etc), and Islamic State. Neo-jihadist organisations reflect a significant theological, tactical and political departure from militant groups of the past, such as Lashkar-e-Tayaba, Jaish-e-Muhammad and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen

---

2 See for example Laquer (1977), Pipes (2013), Arnett (2014).

3 For the elaboration of my argument on the multi-causality behind violent extremism in Pakistan see Iqbal (2015).

(classified as religious nationalists). For instance, unlike religious nationalist groups, Neo-jihadists abhor the idea of nation states and term it un-Islamic. This helps them justify attacks against the Pakistani state and society. Since territorial borders are deemed un-Islamic, these groups firmly believe in global *jihad*, an idea pioneered by al Qaeda. This has created fissures with Afghan Taliban, who maintained themselves as a religious nationalist force. Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, which once spearheaded this wave, launched a number of transnational terrorist attacks (Iqbal 2010) but interestingly Afghan Taliban have not been found involved in acts of terrorism beyond Afghanistan.

Neo-jihadism in Pakistan can be understood as an unintended outcome of American intervention in Afghanistan. Jihadi organisations existed long before the US intervened in Afghanistan in October 2001. These groups, however, rarely conducted attacks on Pakistani soil. Their primary objective was to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan. But as the US and their allies launched military offensives to target al Qaeda hideouts, a number of groups mushroomed up in the adjacent Pakistani tribal region to support their ‘Muslim brethren’ against a ‘Crusader’s’ onslaught’ (Abu Yahya Shamsheer-e-Be Nayam). Many in FATA perceived American intervention as repetition of events in 1980s, when thousands of tribesmen were mobilised by the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to fight what they regard as ‘infidels’. With similar zeal and zest clerics like Sufi Muhammad mobilised thousands of Pakistanis to wage holy war against Americans and their allies but gradually they turned inwards. There are various reasons as to why neo-jihadists came to focus more on jihad against Pakistan instead of staying committed to their initially stated cause: the “liberation of Afghanistan from foreign occupation”.<sup>4</sup> Firstly, it could have been a conscious decision by the insurgents to weaken this important knot of the American-led coalition. Under President Musharraf’s rule Pakistan had served as the most vital supply route for NATO forces stationed in Afghanistan, provided two of its airbases and extended maximum political, military and intelligence support to the US-led global war on terror. Secondly, the decision to turn their guns against Pakistan was possibly the result of serious differences between Afghan Taliban and al Qaeda. Both enjoyed cordial relations until the international coalition dislodged the former. It was then the Afghan Taliban might have realised that any hint of their global ambitions could possibly damage their cause to liberate Afghanistan from foreign forces.

---

4 See for example the editorial of Ahyay-e-Khilafat (Restoration of Caliphate) (2013).

The TTP's close association with the transnational terrorist outfit made it more lethal and indiscriminate. According to several databases maintained by different Pakistani government and private organisations including National Counter-Terrorism Authority, Pak Institute for Peace Studies, Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies and South Asia Terrorism Portal, groups falling in this category are responsible for more than 70 per cent terrorist attacks in the country since 2004.<sup>5</sup> The majority of these attacks targeted civilians. High "collateral damage" in the TTP attacks led to decline in popular support for the neo-jihadists, who were until then perceived as legitimate holy warriors fighting to defend Muslim lands against the US and their allies. Such was the level of support in the initial few years of FATA insurrection that the people would refuse to attend the funeral of Pakistani soldiers who died in fight against TTP. This changed when Pakistanis suffered deadly terrorist attacks sparing none. By 2009, public attitude towards neo-jihadists had started to show signs of detest and disapproval. Taking advantage of this shift in popular support the government launched renewed military campaigns in Swat (Operation Rah-e-Haq), Mohmand (Operation Brekhna) and South Waziristan (Operation Rah-e-Nijat) resulting in partial success. As the terrorists came under pressure in the tribal region, they accelerated attacks in the mainland. In 2010, a slight increase was witnessed in the overall number of attacks. Militant leadership in operation-hit areas had either fled to Afghanistan or moved to North Waziristan agency, which would continue to serve as a terrorist hotbed for years to come. For a variety of reasons, ranging from lack of logistics to the fear of massive backlash in the mainland, the government avoided clearing terrorist hideouts in North Waziristan, and areas adjacent to FATA until the neo-jihadists targeted Army Public School (APS) in December 2014.

The Army Public School (APS) attack of December 2014 was a watershed event that forced the policy-makers to go decisively against TTP. Operation Zarb-e-Azb, which was launched a few months prior to the attack, was intensified and its geographic scope extended to the settled areas. Pakistani leadership launched renewed efforts to engage Afghan leadership and international forces stationed there to act against TTP's first and second tier leadership.<sup>6</sup> A sustained counter-narrative campaign launched by the civil society, media and government institutions further squeezed the

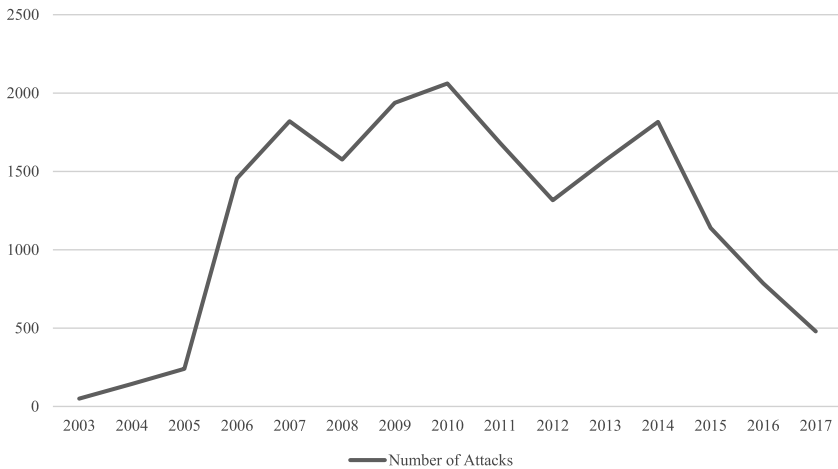
---

5 This figure is based on regular monitoring of the terrorism databases mentioned in the text.

6 Kaphle. The Washington Post, 25 December 2014.

ideological space for terrorists. Such coordinated efforts yielded tremendous results. As the physical and ideological infrastructure of terrorists suffered heavy losses the number of terrorist incidents declined sharply. By 2017 the annual number of attacks has gone down to about 480 (mostly low-intensity) from 2,100 (mostly high-casualty attacks) in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1: Annual Number of Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan



Source: based on data provided by National Counter-Terrorism Authority (2019).

The downwards trend continued in 2018, which experienced a further 29 per cent decline in attacks perpetrated by different terrorist organisations (PIPS 2019). Despite a visible decline, neo-jihadists managed to make their presence felt. Out of total 251 attacks in 2018, 171 were carried by TTP and its allies (PIPS 2019). The year 2018 also marked the elimination of top leadership, including Fazlullah, killed in a US drone strike in Kunar province of Afghanistan;<sup>8</sup> his son Abdullah was killed in a separate airstrike in March 2018 in the same area. The TTP also confirmed the death of its commander Khalid Mehsud aka Khan Said Sajna, who was hit by a missile fired by the US drone in North Waziristan.

7 See Figure 1.

8 Al-Jazeera, 15 June 2018.



In a desperate attempt for survival, many TTP fighters and second tier leaders associated themselves with Daesh<sup>9</sup>, but that failed to bring any relief to either side. During all these years, more specifically from 2015 to 2018, Daesh also suffered heavy losses in form of arrests of hundreds of its members from across Pakistan. Since its arrival in the country in January 2015 the global terrorist outfit started a recruitment campaign. Instead of radicalizing a new generation of fighters, the group drew from an existing pool of radicals, hitherto associated with other local outfits. A conservative estimate based on desk and field research puts the total numeric strength of the group in Pakistan at approximately 2,000 individuals with almost half of them migrating to neighbouring Afghanistan. Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) had produced the highest number of ISIS fighters (Iqbal 2016). Punjab stood second with 54 of its inhabitants either leaving their homes to fight in Syria and Iraq or dedicating their efforts to organizing Daesh in Pakistan.<sup>10</sup> A majority of IS-linked individuals in Punjab had parted ways from Lashkar-e-Tayeba. The TTP, organisationally opposed Daesh, but a number of splinter groups emerged from within to join the Baghdadi-led transnational outfit. Prominent examples included Jamat-ul-Ahrar and Jundullah-Pakistan. Many Lashkar-e-Jhangvi fighters, who have collaborated with the TTP in the past, also switched allegiance to Daesh.

With the help of local collaborators, the IS tried to take on Pakistan, but a swift response from Pakistani law enforcement and intelligence agencies foiled this attempt.

---

9 Daesh is an Arabic acronym for the group's first official title "ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fi 'l-'Irāq wa-sh-Shām", which literally translates into Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, it was later changed into Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and finally as the Islamic State (IS).

10 For an in-depth discussion of the penetration of Daesh in Pakistan see Iqbal (2018).

*Table 1: Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan involving ISIS*

No	Date	Place	Target	Casualties	
				Killed	Injured
1	8 Sep 2014	Karachi	US Naval Vessel	1 Arm <sup>11</sup> 3 Mil <sup>12</sup>	-
2	4 Jan 2015	FATA	Army Soldier	1 Arm	-
3	23 Apr 2015	Karachi	HR Activist	1 Civ <sup>13</sup>	-
4	13 May 2015	Karachi	Isamili Civilians	46 Civ	12 Civ
5	6 Apr 2015	Orakzai Agency, FATA	Army Convoy	3 Arm	4 Arm
6	13 Jan 2016	Islamabad	News TV	-	-
7	16 Feb 2017	Jamshoro	Sufi Shrine	91 Civ	250 Civ
8	23 Jun 2017	Quetta	JUI-Nazriati	7 Civ, 7 LEA	21 Civ
9	05 Oct 2017	Jhal Magsi	Sufi Shrine	22 Civ	30 Civ
10	17 December 2017	Quetta	Church	9 Civ	56 Civ
11	02 April 2018	Quetta	Christians	4 Civ	-
12	13 July 2018	Quetta	Political Party	150 Civ	185
13	25 Jul 2018	Quetta	Police	25 Civ 6 LEA	75 Civ
14	27 November 2018	Orakzai	Shia Market	35 Civ	45 Civ

Source: the author.

By July 2016, hundreds of Daesh operatives were apprehended from settled areas and tribal loyalists of Daesh were forced to flee to Afghanistan. In 2018, Abu Sayed Orakzai, a top commander of the Islamic State’s Khorasan chapter and brother of ISIS founder in the region Saeed Khan was also killed in Afghanistan.

### *Sectarian Terrorism*

Sectarian groups have caused the highest number of terrorism-related casualties after neo-jihadists. Traditionally, the sectarian terrorist landscape was characterised by the dominance of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which targeted Pakistan’s Shia community and Sipah-e-Muhammad, a Shia group that would resort to retaliatory attacks against LeJ, a Sunni sectarian terrorist organisation. But in the aftermath of 9/11 sectarian militancy has also been transformed. LeJ expanded its target pool to include Barelvis (the majority sect

11 Army personnel.  
12 Militant.  
13 Civilian.

in Pakistan), which led to Barelvi reassertion in political as well as militant spheres.

Following the tectonic shift in the regional security environment post 9/11, LeJ split into two wings; one wing kept its focus on sectarian terrorism, while the second aligned with transnational terrorist outfits, such as TTP, al Qaeda and most recently Daesh, to pursue international agendas. The international wing also rebranded itself as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Almi in 2009. How did LeJ evolved into LeJ-International? Why did the organisation opt to extend operations across the border and diversify its targets? To find out the answers, one needs to examine the post 9/11 developments in the region, which radically transformed the militant landscape of Pakistan. The country witnessed a dramatic rise in numbers of new terrorist outfits in the tribal as well as mainland Pakistan. Various jihadi outfits went rogue or experienced massive fractionalisation. The LeJ could not remain indifferent to the changing atmosphere. The group diversified its targets and made a conscious decision to work for al Qaeda along with pursuing sectarian agendas against Shias of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran (Gurnatna and Iqbal 2012).

Soon after 9/11, the group was divided into two factions – the first led by Asif Ramzi primarily operating with al Qaeda against Western and Pakistani government targets and the second headed by Akram Lahori operating against the Shias. When members of Asif Ramzi's group were arrested by the police in 2002, they were asked why they spared arch-rival Shia sect. They claimed that the Shia are their enemies, but their picture was ideologically bigger and 'playing the international game' against US, their Allies and friends. While Asif Ramzi's group only operated in Karachi, Akram Lahori's group operated throughout Pakistan.

Following the government crackdown on LeJ in 2003, the group members dispersed in different parts of Pakistan, most of them relocating to FATA to prepare for a new round of violence against the Shias, the Pakistani state and Western targets. LeJ's central organisational structure was dismantled; as a result, the group got divide into different cells. Nevertheless, the anti-Shia agenda helped to keep these small cells united on ideological and operational grounds.

The word "al-almi" (international) in LeJ's title and agenda was first added and made public in September 2009, when during the last Friday of Ramazan, a suicide vehicle destroyed an entire market on the Kohat-Hangu Road and killed 33 people. The shops were mostly owned by Shia Muslims and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Almi claimed the attack. The addition of "al-almi" (international) with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's name was a clear indication of group's inclination to go global.

In the following days, LeJ-International launched deadly terrorist strikes across Pakistan. On 16 April 2010, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami claimed the bombing at a hospital in Quetta. The bomb attack was carried out while members of the Shia sect came to the hospital with the body of a bank manager, who was shot dead by unidentified armed men. The same group claimed responsibility for the back-to-back suicide attacks in Kacha Pakha area of Kohat, where, according to eyewitnesses, two burqa-clad bombers mowed down 41 internally displaced persons (IDPs), who had gathered in front of the UN offices to collect free of cost food items on 17 April 2010. The tactics used in the blasts were the same as in Quetta. The first explosion killed and injured only a few persons, but there was another, more powerful explosion when people came to help remove the bodies and shift the injured to hospital. The group was also found involved in multiple execution-style killings of Shia Muslims in Quetta in 2011. In sum, LeJ's trajectory of evolution clearly demonstrates the group's ability to recover from the loss of key leadership and capability to launch attacks at its will and choice.

Since LeJ was going global and found involved in quite a significant number of attacks in the mainland, Pakistan took several counter-terrorism measures, hard and soft, to pacify the group. Law enforcement agencies squeezed the group in urban areas, especially Karachi, through coordinated intelligence-based operations. At one point, when hundreds of LeJ fighters were switching allegiance to al Qaeda and becoming even more lethal, the court released Malik Ishaq, one of the three founding members of LeJ. Some security experts speculated that the release was aimed at preventing further splintering of the group and mainstream the fighters through political process. The idea, however failed, as the leadership of Ahl-e-Sunnat Waljamat (formerly known as Sipah-e-Sahaba) refused to accommodate Malik in a leadership position. This forced Malik Ishaq to look for new violent allies, including Daesh. It was only after he established communication with the Daesh leadership in the Middle East and Afghanistan that the law enforcement realised the futility of their plan. In July 2015, Malik Ishaq alongwith his two sons was killed in a police encounter in Muzzafargarh (Gabol 2015). Killing Malik failed to disrupt operational linkages with Daesh. Till today, most of the attacks claimed by Daesh in Pakistan are conducted by LeJ fighters.<sup>14</sup> Although there has been a significant decline in sectarian attacks perpetrated by LeJ on its own

---

14 Interview with Zahid Mehmood, a counter-terrorism researcher belonging to Quetta. Interview conducted by the author in Islamabad, 15 October 2019.

or on behalf of Daesh, the group continues to pose a serious threat because of its transnational linkages. Based on the above considerations, I understand that events in the Middle East can potentially revive LeJ and further strengthen its nexus with the IS.

The war in the Middle East, which I consider to be commonly agreed upon as an Arab-Iran proxy war, has profoundly shaped sectarian militancy in Pakistan. As stated above, Shia groups were reactionary in nature but their recently acquired battle-field experience under the alleged tutelage of Iranian intelligence can make them more aggressive. In pursuit of its geo-strategic objectives, Iranian government has deployed several proxy forces in the Middle East. Over the last eight years approximately 5,000 Pakistani men under the banner of “Zainabyoon” have participated in a war I claim to be completely orchestrated by Iranian intelligence (Azam and Iqbal 2017). The name Zainabyoon, meaning the followers of Zainab, was chosen for religious reasons. The group's stated purpose is to defend of the shrine of Hazrat Zaynab bint Ali, the granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad and other Shia holy sites in Syria (Zahid 2016). This was also the rallying cry of Al-Zainabyoon “Kuluna Abbasika Ya Zainab”, which literally means “O Zainab, We are all Abbas”.<sup>15</sup> Historically, Abbas is considered to have defended Zainab, the daughter of Ali (the fourth caliph of Islam and cousin of the founder of Islam, Prophet Muhammad) against Yazid’s lashkar. Practically, however, the group’s role is not only limited to defense of what they consider a holy shrine. The group has actively participated in numerous offensives against anti-Asad forces.

Pakistani Shiite jihadists were apparently latecomers to the Syrian theatre of war. The first signs of their participation in the conflict on the Syrian state side appeared in 2013, after a rocket attack on the shrine of Zainab in Damascus. The initial recruitment seems to have taken place at local levels in Shiite-dominated areas of Kurram Agency’s Parachinar town and Hangu with over seven people travelling to Syria via Iran. According to local a source, approximately 1,150 individuals were recruited from Parachinar, out of which 196 were killed, 800 returned home and the rest chose either to continue fighting in Syria or settle in Iran.<sup>16</sup> Initially, Pakistani Shias fought as part of a unit of Afghan fighters, called the “Fatimeyoun.” However, the numbers swelled over time as more organised recruitment methods, such as pilgrimage tours to Iran, were utilised, and a separate

---

15 Translated by the author.

16 Interview with Arshad Bangash, a native of Parachinar. Interview conducted by the author in Islamabad, 31 October 2019.

unit called “Liwa Zainabyoun” was raised under Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (I.R.G.C.). This development was seen as Iran’s effort to expand a regional network of Shiite militia-type organisations on the model of Hezbollah. The I.R.G.C.-affiliated Fars News describes the unit as 5,000-strong (Nadimi 2016), but certain Western news agencies estimated the numerical strength of the group at no more than 1,000. Regardless of their number, it is clear that the Shiite jihadists in the Iraqi and Syrian theatre greatly outnumber Western and Pakistani ISIS fighters. Initially, the number of recruits was too small to be called a brigade, however, in early 2015 the organisation successfully hired more than 1,000 fighters from Pakistan.<sup>17</sup> In a BBC report, the total number of Zainabyoon fighters was somewhere around 2,000.<sup>18</sup> Pakistani intelligence sources, however, put this number at approximately 5,000 individuals. Hundreds of them have been killed in action and many more continue to return home after successfully defending the Assad-regime. Some of these returnees have been apprehended.

The emergence of Zainabyoon indicates three alarming trends: firstly, Shia militants can possibly confront the Deobandi LeJ head-on, instead of sticking to their traditional reactive and selective modus operandi (Azam and Iqbal 2017); secondly, in case of direct military confrontation with the US, Iran can remobilise these thousands of fighters to target American interests in Pakistan. In such a scenario, Pakistan will come under severe international pressure to act against Iran-backed elements in the country; thirdly, a number of protests were organised by various Shia organisations across Pakistan for the release of Zanabyoon fighters. Such a widespread support for a terrorist group among Pakistani Shias and their approval of Iran’s actions in the Middle East can complicate the government’s actions to act decisively. In my personal interactions with educated Shias in Pakistan during the last five years a majority justified the fighters’ ‘voluntary’ participation as the need to defend the shrine of Sayyeda Zeinab against assaults by the Islamic State.

### *Ethno-Nationalist Militancy*

Ethno-nationalist insurgency in Pakistan is mainly divided into two theatres: Balochistan and Sindh provinces. Prominent Baloch militant groups

---

17 Tribune, 11 December 2015.

18 Kirmani. BBC Urdu, 31 May 2018.

include Baloch Liberation Army, Baloch Liberation Front, and Baloch Republican Army. In November 2018, these groups came together to form Baloch Raaji Ajoī Sangar (Baloch National Freedom Front). There are two known Sindhi nationalist militant groups including Sindhu Desh Liberation Front and Sindhu Desh Liberation Army. Sindhi nationalist groups have thus far failed to conduct any major attack. Their target selection usually includes government infrastructure, such as railway tracks, gas pipelines, and political opponents, such as pro-federation Pakistan Peoples' Party, and religious groups thought as doing the government's bid.

According to Pakistan Security Report 2018 published by Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), ethno-nationalist insurgents, mainly Baloch, have been found involved in more than 32 per cent of all attacks recorded during the year. Increased Chinese economic involvement has provided a new impetus to the Baloch insurgency, which in the past purely targeted the central government. The contemporary Baloch separatist narrative equates Chinese projects with Pakistani imperialism and declares them both the enemy of Baloch land and resources.<sup>19</sup>

Although the insurgency dates back to 1948, the recent wave that started in 2005, has demonstrated some new trends. Historically, the leadership of the Baloch insurgency and polity has resided with the tribal elite, but the post-2005 militancy in Balochistan has witnessed the emergence of a new educated middle class, which now forms the majority in groups like BLF, whose central leader Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch also comes from a middle-class background. Such changes have also impacted the tactics and target selection of the Baloch militants. Traditionally, Baloch insurgents largely targeted combatants, including personnel of armed forces and law enforcement agencies, symbols of the state and energy infrastructure. Aversion to targeting non-combatants brought legitimacy to their cause, which ultimately resulted in cross-sectional support from the society, including non-Baloch. In the past, ranks and files of Baloch separatists also included left-wing activists. But during the last decade or so Baloch organisations have indiscriminately targeted civilians in and outside Balochistan, which deprived them of popular support, considered to be one of the most important factors to wage a successful insurgency (Galula 1964). This attitude towards the non-Baloch population of Balochistan also shows a paradigm shift in the separatists' policies and objectives when put in the context of past insurrections of 1948 and 1970s.

---

19 ANI News, 25 November 2018.

Similarly, the organisations have now adopted tactics that result in higher collateral damage. From ambushes on security forces and attacks on power pylons/gas pipelines, the choice of tactics now also includes suicide bombings. The BLA has formed a specialised suicide squad called “Majeed Brigade” to target Pakistani security forces and Chinese interests in the country. This wing was created in 2010 and named after two top commanders of BLA who were killed at different locations and times. The first Majeed Baloch died in 1970 while he was trying to assassinate the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in Quetta. The second commander named Majeed was killed by Pakistani security forces in 2010. The BLA named its anti-China wing in memory of these two commanders (PICSS 2018).

In the past carefully selected tactics and targets won the Baloch insurgents international acclaim and legitimacy, two of the most crucial elements for waging successful guerrilla warfare. But the use of human bombs, advertent and inadvertent targeting of civilians cost them both. In July 2019, citing some recent suicide attacks against Chinese and Pakistani civilians, the United States officially declared BLA a global terrorist organisation. The declaration came as a massive blow to the insurgency. According to my evaluation, it was seen as a reciprocal measure from the US in response to Pakistan’s constructive role to bring Afghan Taliban to the table. It might be speculated that the ban was the result of joint Pakistan-China diplomatic efforts after the group accelerated attacks in 2018.

### *Religious Nationalist Militants and Organisational Mainstreaming*

Kashmir-centric groups, such as Lashkar-e-Tayeba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Harkatul Mujahideen and Harkatul Jihad e Islami, are included in this category. Many of these groups are considered the by-product of the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad. They are termed religious nationalist because of the primacy of religion for their cause with strong believe in the idea of nation-states. Unlike neo-jihadists, religious nationalists strongly oppose anti-Pakistan jihad. Therefore, the top leaders of LeT, JeM, HuJI and HM including Hafiz Saeed, Massod Azhar and Fazl-u-Rehman Khalil have all condemned the TTP and issued religious decrees against the group. These differences have led to violent clashes between LeT and TTP in the past.<sup>20</sup>

---

20 Notable occurrence includes the 2008 clashes between the two groups in Mohmand district.



Organisationally, religious nationalists have not been found involved in anti-Pakistan militancy, mainly due to cordial relations with the country's powerful security establishment. But break-away individuals of these outfits have joined neo-jihadist organisations and assisted them expanding battlefield from the tribal region to mainland Pakistan. There were two major waves of factionalism within the religious nationalist militant segment; first, when India and Pakistan started a composite dialogue in 2005; and the second was Operation Sunrise against Lal Masjid (2007). Both events had severe impacts on the ideology of thousands of erstwhile religious nationalist elements, they parted ways from their parent organisations, moved to FATA, where they imparted all their fighting skill to the neo-jihadists. Punjabi Taliban, Abna-e-Hafsa and Ghazi Brigade were some of the groups, which purely consisted of break-away factions of religious nationalists. They proved more destructive than the tribal fighters (Iqbal 2015).

Transnational terrorist organisations like al Qaeda and Daesh have also tried to prey upon militants associated with LeT and JeM. Many Daesh-linked individuals from Punjab were previously operating under LeT's banner. Such was the fear of losing hundreds of its fighters to Daesh that JuD (formerly LeT) published more than twenty booklets against the *tak-firi* ideology of ISIS. In these they proclaimed that some groups of Muslims are moving away from the tenets of Islam. These booklets are also available in the national language – Urdu – and are written by Saudi intellectuals (Rana 2017).

### *De-Radicalisation and Rehabilitation of JuD Fighters*

Given the severity of the challenge, the state has tried to deal with religious nationalists through soft counter-terrorism involving de-radicalisation and rehabilitation. Since Punjab served as the main recruitment hub for religious nationalist militants, most of the government's counter-measures were focused there. In 2010, the Punjab government initiated the de-radicalisation and rehabilitation of former jihadi militants. Punjab police's Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and Technical and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) jointly ran this programme. The Punjab government's programme targeted former jihadi militants, willing to undergo rehabilitation to bring them towards normal life, help them with alternative livelihood opportunities and engage them in different trades. In 2012 to 2013, the Punjab Government approved the Financial Assistance Scheme allocating around Rs.9.33 million along with service charges

(Rs. 0.653 million).<sup>21</sup> The financial assistance was given in collaboration with Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) to the technically trained militants/jihadi persons, who belong to different defunct jihadi organisations and remained involved in militancy/jihadi activities etc.. A Maximum amount of PKR 30,000 (equivalent of 300 USD during that particular time period) was given to the identified successful trainees as interest free loan for starting up a business. Loans were disbursed by Punjab Small Industries Corporation's (PSIC) regional offices through concerned Regional Director, concerned District Development Officer, PSIC and representative from TEVTA/PVTC.

By June 2016, three batches of 311 participants had completed training. These trainings and rehabilitations were organised at various regional and district headquarters to make it convenient for participants to attend. After completion of training, field formations of CTD monitor the activities of participants to oversee and reduce the chances of recidivism.

Table 2: Number of Militants Rehabilitated in Punjab

S. No	District	No. of Rehabilitated Militants
1	Rajapur	16
2	Bahawalpur	48
3	Lahore	15
4	Rawalpindi	10
5	Chakwal	6
6	Faisalabad	14
7	Khanewal	8
8	Multan	7
9	Sahiwal	19
10	D.G.Khan	16
11	Rahim Yar Khan	19
12	Gujranwala	8
13	Attock	14
14	Mianwali	20
15	Bhakkar	11
		<b>Total 231</b>

Source: the author.

As per the criteria laid out by the Punjab government monitoring the impact of trained and rehabilitated was measured and monitored after six months. Considering global best practices in de-radicalisation and rehabilitation of former combatants, six months' time appears to be sufficient to evaluate whether the programme is delivering positive results or not. After

21 All information above are based on multiple visits to TEVTA in 2017.

the completion of the rehabilitation programme, the detainee would attend a three-week regular rehabilitation programme in which the entire family of the detainee was also involved in order to sensitise them about the importance of follow-up counselling sessions. After the rehabilitation, the government makes it compulsory for the rehabilitated militants to stay in touch with the police station in their region for next six months.

Besides individual de-radicalisation and rehabilitation, the group has attempted to reorient itself as mainstream political party. In August 2017, many leaders of JuD announced a new political party under the banner of Milli Muslim League. The transformation of militant outfits is a frequently practiced method for de-radicalisation and counter-terrorism. It is a process through which armed groups come to shun violence to become a part of political or social mainstream. Historical antecedents prove that the political mainstreaming of militant outfits can bring about major shifts in their ideologies that eventually become non-violent. Although militants' transformation into a political party is not unprecedented, JuD's decision met with stiff internal and external resistance for valid reasons. The attempt to transform failed mainly due to non-adherence to some of the guiding principles of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). There is a widespread consensus among the scholars of DDR that such a programme may work well if all the key actors involved have a shared vision for the outcome (Berdel and Ucko 2009). But in this case, there was simply no attempt by the organisation to take into confidence the key stakeholders within and outside the country. Hence, no political party in Pakistan came to support JuD's decision to rebrand itself as a political party nor did the state institutions. In September 2017, based on recommendations from intelligence agencies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Interior Ministry of Pakistan asked the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) not to register MML.<sup>22</sup> Within next two weeks, the ECP rejected MML's plea to register as a political party. United States saw this development as an effort by Lashkar-e-Taiba 'to circumvent sanctions and deceive the public about its true character' (Anwar 2018). Critics of the whole process saw it as an ISI ploy to mainstream its former proxy with a view to expand the popular support base of the group. This attempt was also intended to channelise their activities towards charity and political work. In sum, the sceptics interpreted the formation of Milli Muslim League not as demobilisation, but remobilisation through other means.

---

22 The News, 27 September 2017.

Few, who favoured transformation, argued that the mainstreaming of these organisations will render them obsolete in the long run<sup>23</sup> as Pakistanis have hardly voted for religious parties in the general elections. One exception was the general elections held under the military regime in 2002, which led to the formation of MMA government, an alliance of five religious parties. This was, however, what I consider to be an engineered victory intended to appease the charged religious sentiments in the wake of the American-led intervention in neighbouring Afghanistan. Thus, in view of historic trends of electioneering in the country, the best way to deal with the religious nationalist militants seems to be to let the nation decide its fate. The rationale behind the usefulness of political mainstreaming is that the religiously driven groups have to broaden their appeal to seek electoral power. In order to get votes in elections such organisations must abandon their radical ideas, and pursue a developmental agenda to win over electoral constituencies.

The failed attempt of rebranding itself from a militant organisation into a political party might also be driven by some indigenous factors. The international environment changed dramatically after the US launched their global war on terror and became less conducive for terrorist organisations to maintain their physical infrastructure and international financial networks. JuD was not an exception. It relied heavily on a network of local and international charities to generate funds for its operations inside Pakistan and beyond. In the aftermath of GoT, the US, their allies and international multilateral bodies banned a number of international charities including the al Harmain Foundation, which was instrumental in disbursing funds to global jihadi organisations. Financial constraints aside, the excitement of jihad and the prestige of membership of jihadi organisations had worn off mainly due to death and destruction unleashed by neo-jihadist organisations in the name of jihad. Hafiz Saeed categorically condemned groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and opposed their anti-Pakistan jihad. Staying relevant in view of changing international and domestic conditions was an uphill task and electoral politics offered an easy way out to, as you might put it, ‘live to fight another day’.

The so-called transformation, however, was halted as abruptly as it had started. Following a humiliating defeat in the general elections of 2018, the JuD cum MML disappeared from public and media discourse. The extremely controversial “transformation” whether externally exposed or internally decided, experienced an odd end, which has left thousands of JuD

---

23 Jamal. *The Diplomat*, 8 August 2017.

members neither as political workers nor proper jihadists. It is still not clear whether the group has actually endorsed democracy through contesting the general elections of 2018, but this step does reflect the group's intention to be a part of democratic process. Mere participation in electoral politics would not confer any legitimacy to JuD unless it categorically renounces violence and demonstrates commitment to democratic values. Equally important is to evolve national, regional and international consensus on transforming a group, known for its links with global terrorist networks. Unless, there is a rapprochement between India and Pakistan, generating this consensus could be an uphill task.

### *Conclusion*

The evaluation presented above establishes that the threat of terrorism in Pakistan is multi-dimensional, it is continuously evolving, the state has adopted different sets of policy interventions to deal with various militant organisations, which I consider to have been largely successful as appears from the quantitative decline in the incidents of terrorism in the country. These counter-measures have doubtlessly dented the operational capabilities of terrorist organisations but these partial successes must not lead to counter-terror triumphalism given the volatile regional environment.

South Asian region is set to brace the fallout of the possible drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan. As the US and its allies prepare to withdraw, a number of possible scenarios may emerge with regards to militancy in Pakistan, which can possibly impact the China Pakistan Economic Corridor or vice versa. Multiple militant organisations falling in the neo-jihadist category have previously sought legitimacy from the US presence in Afghanistan, using it as a *raison d'être* to justify their existence (Iqbal 2015). But structural changes in the regional politics, such as the American policy of retreat from conflict zones, coupled with an enhanced focus on containing China will certainly impact the ideological outlook of terrorist organisations. There is a possibility of the revival of Cold War era paroxysm, in which terrorist groups operating from Pakistan could be co-opted or coerced by certain powers to replace the US with China as the enemy of either Islam or Baloch land and resources. The arrest of Kulbhoshan Yadav (March 2016) and the attack on Chinese consulate in Karachi (November 2018) also indicate what I see as how *proxyism* has come to overshadow ideological terrorism. As the regional security environment is likely to witness tectonic shifts in form of possible US drawdown from Afghanistan and increased US-Iran tensions, there is a strong need to analyse how these

developments will affect Pakistani militants of different ideological orientations.

### *References*

- Ahyay-e-Khilafat (Restoration of Caliphate), May 2013. ([https://archive.org/details/hyaEKhilafat6\\_201312/page/n1/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/hyaEKhilafat6_201312/page/n1/mode/2up)). Accessed 29 February 2020.
- Al-Jazeera. 2018. "Pakistan Taliban chief Mullah Fazlullah 'killed in drone attack". 15 June 2018. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/pakistani-taliban-chief-mullah-fazlullah-killed-drone-strike-180615094513389.html>). Accessed 28 January 2020.
- ANI News. 2018. "CPEC turning Balochistan into Chinese colony, says Baloch leader". 25 November 2018. (<https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/cpec-turning-balochistan-into-chinese-colony-says-baloch-leader201811251841420002/>). Accessed 29 February 2020.
- Anwar, Madeeha. 2018. "US Designates Pakistani Party Milli Muslim League as "Terrorists". *Voice of America*, 3 April 2018. (<https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/us-designates-pakistani-party-milli-muslim-league-terrorists>). Accessed 29 February 2020.
- Arnett, George. 2014. "Religious Extremism Main Cause of Terrorism, According To Report". *The Guardian*, 18 November 2014. (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/nov/18/religious-extremism-main-cause-of-terrorism-according-to-report>).
- Azam, Z. and Iqbal, K. 2017. "Shiite Mobilization and the Transformation of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan". *Middle East Institute*, 29 March 2017. (<http://educationmei.edu/content/map/shia-mobilization-and-transformation-sectarian-militancy-pakistan>). Accessed 28 January 2020.
- Berdal, M. and Ucko, D.H., ed. 2009. *Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict: Politics, Violence and Transition*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gabol, I. 2015. "Lashkar-i-Jhangvi chief Malik Ishaq, two sons killed in Muzaffargarh 'encounter'". *Dawn*, 29 July 2015. (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1197098>). Accessed 28 January 2020.
- Galula, David. 1964. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport: Praeger Security International.
- Gunaratna, Rohan and Iqbal, K. 2012. *Pakistan Terrorism Ground Zero*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Hussain, Z. 2017. "Mainstreaming the Militants". *Dawn*, 29 October 2017. Accessed 28 January 2020.
- Iqbal, K. 2010. "TTP: A Global Threat". *Conflict and Peace Studies*, 3 (4): 52-67.
- Iqbal, K. 2015. *The Making of Pakistani Human Bombs*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

- Iqbal, K. 2016. "Evolving Wave of Terrorism and Emergence of Daesh in Pakistan". *Panorama: Insights into Asian and European Affairs*, 2.
- Jamal, U. 2017. "What Is Behind the Political 'Mainstreaming' of Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Pakistan?" *The Diplomat*, 8 August 2017. (<https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/what-is-behind-the-political-mainstreaming-of-jamaat-ud-dawa-in-pakistan/>). Accessed 28 January 2020.
- Jamea Hafsa Forum. N.A. "Question and Answer Session with Mufti Abu Zar". (<http://archive.org/stream/jhuf-sawaljawab/jawabaat#page/n0/mode/2up-5-8>).
- Kaphle, Anup. 2014. "Pakistan Announces a National Plan to Fight Terrorism". *The Washington Post*, 25 December 2014. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/12/24/pakistan-announces-a-national-plan-to-fight-terrorism-says-terrorists-days-are-numbered/>). Accessed 29 February 2020.
- Kirmani, Sikandar. 2018. "Pakistan Key La Pata Shia Kahan Hein?" *BBC Urdu*, 31 May 2018. (<https://www.bbc.com/urdu/pakistan-44288371>). Accessed 28 January 2020.
- Laquer, Walter. 1977. "Interpretations of Terrorism – Fact, Fiction and Political Science". *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (January 1977): 1-42.
- Nadimi, Farzin. 2016. "Iran's Afghan and Pakistani Proxies: In Syria and Beyond?" *The Washington Institute*, 22 August 2016. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-afghan-and-pakistani-proxies-in-syria-and-beyond>). Accessed 28 January 2020.
- National Counter-Terrorism Authority. 2019. "Annual Report 2018". April 2019. (<https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Annual-Report-2018.pdf>). Accessed 29 April 2020.
- Online Islam. N.A. "Obtaining Parents' Permission to Participate in Jihad". (<http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/family/children-a-parenthood/174685.html>). Accessed 19 January 2014.
- Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). 2019. "Pakistan Security Report 2018". 6 January 2019. (<https://www.pakpips.com/article/book/pakistan-security-report-2018>). Accessed 28 January 2020.
- Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS). 2018. "Fidayeen Majeed Brigade, the Elite Unit of BLA". 26 November 2018. (<https://www.picss.net/fidayeen-majeed-brigade-the-elite-unit-of-bla/>). Accessed 29 February 2020.
- Pipes, Daniel. 2013. "Denying Islam's Role in Terror: Explaining the Denial". *Middle East Quarterly*, 20 (Spring 2013): 3-12.
- Rana, M. A. 2017. "The Political Face of JuD". *Dawn*, 13 August 2017. (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1351281>). Accessed 28 January 2020.
- The News. 2017. "Interior Ministry asks ECP not to register Milli Muslim League". 27 September 2017. (<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/232955-Interior-Ministry-asks-ECP-not-to-register-Milli-Muslim-League>). Accessed 29 February 2020.
- Tribune. 2015. "Iran Recruits Pakistani Shias for Combat in Syria". *Tribune*, 11 December 2015. (<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1007694/iran-recruits-pakistani-shias-for-combat-in-syria/>). Accessed 28 January 2020.

Zahid, F. 2016. "The Zainabiyoun Brigade: A Pakistani Shiite Militia Amid the Syrian Conflict". *Jamestown Foundation*, 27 May 2016. (<https://jamestown.org/program/the-zainabiyoun-brigade-a-pakistani-shiite-militia-amid-the-syrian-conflict/#.V6nKM1t961t>). Accessed 28 January 2020.



# Malaysian Women and Islamic Radicalisation in the Home

*Serina Rahman*<sup>1</sup>

## *Introduction*

As an increasingly conservative wave of Islam engulfs the globe, literalist Salafi interpretations of the faith have become prevalent in Malaysia. Over the past year, there has been increasing recognition of women's roles as recruiters, financiers and influencers for radical Islamic groups. More women have been arrested for their support for and involvement in the Islamic State (IS), but much of the focus has been on their desire to marry a jihadi soldier or channel funds to the cause. In Malaysia, these women (including returnees from IS) are seen to be followers, not decision-makers or active agents in extremist action. While it is assumed that Malaysian Malay women endure the restrictions of cultural and Islamic patriarchy, they do have agency in the home, and exercise this power and centrality within the private sphere by wielding religion as a tool to exert influence over their spouse and children.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that more attention needs to be paid to mothers as potential nurturers of extremist interpretations of Islam and that there is a possibility that they could be vectors of radicalisation (whether violent or otherwise) given their unrivalled influence in the home. This ethnographic study of women in both rural and urban Malaysia reveals that women may be susceptible to the process of radicalisation through religious social gatherings, and should extremist views be

---

1 Serina Rahman is a Visiting Fellow at the Malaysia Programme, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. She is deeply grateful to Francis Hutchinson and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) for the opportunity and funding to complete this study, and would also like to thank Vilashini Solmiah for her collaboration and contribution to the research. Much appreciation also goes to La Toya Waha for the opportunity to present this paper at the KAS conference, "United by Violence, Divided by Cause?", and the invaluable feedback from Dr. Waha and other participants on its content. A version of this chapter, with extensive details on the ethnographic observations of Malaysian Muslim women, is published as an ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Trends in Southeast Asia (2020/2).

internalised, they can then be disseminated to or enforced upon offspring and spouse.

This study was borne of a decade's participant observation<sup>2</sup> of rural women in the southwest of Peninsular Malaysia. It seemed that women dealt with a particularly patriarchal society by establishing power within the private sphere of the home by using religion as the tool of choice to exert control over their offspring and spouse. Subsequent research into the possibility of rural mothers and mother-figures perpetuating more conservative or exclusivist interpretations of Islam in the home took a different turn, however, as I realised that this state of affairs already existed in Malaysia's capital, urban Kuala Lumpur and its outskirts.

In 2017, the first woman with links to the Islamic State (IS) was arrested in Singapore; subsequent media coverage of similar arrests in Malaysia and Indonesia enabled the acceptance of an article on women as possible advocates of terror that had previously been deemed 'rather difficult content'.<sup>3</sup> In May 2018, the Surabaya family suicide bombings shocked the region and the rejection of this theory as being 'offensive to mothers' dissipated.

Initially meant to focus on just rural women, informant interviews broadened the quest to Kuala Lumpur and its wealthy suburbs. The perpetuation of exclusivist and intolerant views amongst mothers and encouragement to engage in the defence of the greater Islamic cause, or at least to carry out 'financial jihad' (*jihad bil maal*)<sup>4</sup>, was already in motion.

This paper will begin by outlining the meaning of radicalisation and extremism as used in this chapter, then set the scene with an introduction to Malaysian society; its patriarchy and recent leanings towards a more intolerant and literal Islam. It will then examine the multiple roles of Malay-

---

2 Participant observation is an ethnographic methodology in which study subjects are observed and documented while the researcher is immersed within the community, amongst the subjects. This method recognises the need for a researcher to become part of the group under study to enable the group to act as naturally as possible, then for the researcher to return to the written photograph of the data collected to understand and write about it while maintaining objectivity. See Bernard (1994), and Kawulich (2005).

3 Rahman and Lim (2017).

4 Jihad bil maal or jihad bi al-Mal is understood as 'financial jihad' which, in its authentic interpretation, is to use your economic resources and wealth to eliminate the poverty and suffering of the poor. This concept is discussed in Chapter 107 of the Quran (Surah al-Ma'un). However, in this context, the concept is misused as a tool to gather financial donations in support of jihad in the sense of war against the non-believers.

Also see: Rana (2011) and Institute of Policy Studies (2008).

Muslim women in this increasingly conservative society. A discussion of the private and public spheres and how women are seen as perfect pillars of Islam in the home follows. The similarities between the scenario in Malaysia and radicalisation processes under IS are highlighted. Findings from the field are discussed before concluding with possible ways forward.

While this publication attempts to answer the question of whether a woman can use religion to enhance her position and power in the home and among her peers, the overarching goal is to join the dots between seemingly disparate components and highlight the need to look beyond the myth of a mother's purity and perfection in efforts to counter increasingly exclusivist views that feather the nest of hateful extremism.

### *Data and Methodology*

Much of the data gathered for this work was collected from a string of rural fishing villages in southwest Johor, Malaysia between 2008 and 2019. In-depth research specific to this chapter began with an extensive literature review of publications on gender in Islam, Malaysia and Islamic extremism, as well as in the fields of counter-terrorism, political Islam and IS (formerly ISIS, the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq).<sup>5</sup> Informant interviews were held with gender and women's rights experts as well as with researchers in counter-terrorism and Malaysian Islamic radicalisation. This led to other contacts in the field and religious study circle participants.<sup>6</sup>

To better understand some of the ways in which women learn about and discuss Islam with their peers and religious teachers, I attended neo-Salafi English-language seminars and more progressive religious study sessions. Popular preachers recommended by informants were followed online on YouTube or on Facebook. Participation in a conference on Women Rising against Extremism<sup>7</sup> also provided information and contacts. This is a qualitative, partially ethnographic analysis of women (specifically

---

5 While IS is considered an outlier in Islam and for many, not even deemed Islamic in any way, the organisation bears some study for the attraction it is known to have amongst disenchanted Muslims – if not to physically migrate to its territories or enact terror, then to perpetuate its teachings and encourage others to act.

6 These women attended study circles in Bangi, Kota Damansara, Petaling Jaya and Shah Alam in Selangor, Malaysia. These areas are considered the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city.

7 The conference 'Women Rising Against Extremism' was organised by Sisters in Islam in Kuala Lumpur from 14 to 18 October 2019.

mothers) and their approach to religious education, dissemination and self-empowerment. The specific methods used to collect and analyse data include participant observation, formal and informal interviews and literature reviews; after which the data was analysed using triangulation, as well as qualitative coding for common themes and threads.<sup>8</sup> The names of informants, interviewees and study circle participants have been changed or omitted.

### *Delineating the Terms*

Radicalisation is most often seen as a transformative process or movement in the direction of supporting or enacting radical behaviour, or towards extremism (Borum 2011; Neumann 2013; Kruglanski et al. 2014). The idea of what is 'extreme' thus hinges upon what society deems is 'mainstream'; a society in which conservative interpretations of a faith is seen as the norm may not construe an act of violence in defence of their faith as extreme (Borum 2011:10).

Radicalisation is political in that the process tends to reject or undermine an accepted status quo or ideas.<sup>9</sup> Hateful radicalisation, as understood here, is the process of becoming increasingly hateful towards others who are different from oneself (CCE 2019:7). While this too does not guarantee the taking of violent action, its propaganda "turns a blind eye to hate speech, open expressions of racism and politically motivated intimidation" (Neumann 2013:890), as well as "erode psychological barriers to violence" (Borum 2011:29).

This does not bode well for a diverse society like Malaysia.

The radicalisation of Muslims is said to take place when a Muslim community feels threatened by those who are not of the same faith (Liow and Arosai 2019). In the case of Malaysia, however, this has happened even

---

8 While the transcripts of interviews and copious verbatim notes from seminars, conferences and YouTube videos have not been published, they are stored in hard copy. The content was analysed manually to determine common discursive threads, themes, content, words and phrases used etc., then specific points of interest relevant to the hypothesis was extracted for use in the publication. Triangulation of points between sources was made to ensure that content was repeatedly reported by multiple sources for validity.

9 Note that this concept can be applied beyond just religious radicalisation (for example in the case of radical liberals, radical environmentalists, the far right and left of a political spectrum etc.). See: Trip et al. (2019).

though there is a majority Muslim population, as a result of political parties using religion as a tool to retain or regain power (Rahman 2018).

Salafism is often misconstrued as the violent ‘jihadi’ interpretation of Islam, but this is not necessarily true (Kamarulnizam and Mohd Afandi 2015). Mohamed Nawab (2017:14) describes Malaysia’s ‘neo-Salafis’ who reject Sufis and Shiites as deviants and emphasise the importance of a distinct identity from non-Muslims, yet have refashioned themselves into an “appealing face of Salafism.” This is done through English-language seminars pitched at the better-educated, English-speaking populace focusing on topics such as parenting, spirituality and marriage. Neumann (2013) also describes ‘quietist Salafists’ who reject violence, but encourage separation from mainstream (non-Muslim) society.

The discussion in the following sections highlights the social bonds between women in Malaysia, an aspect of Salafi jihad, which has been said to be more important than its ideology (Kruglanski et al. 2014). This chapter examines the possibility of the cognitive radicalisation of women through religious study sessions and thereafter in the home. The normalisation of radical views could potentially jeopardise Malaysia’s harmonious multi-ethnic and multi-faith social fabric.

### *Patriarchy, Public/Private Spheres and Women’s Agency*

Patriarchy is a social construct based on biological differences between male and female, through which gendered assumptions and expectations define spaces and human behaviour (Rajan 2011:18). The public and private sphere dichotomy refers to domains within which an individual is able to exercise influence, dominance and authority (Ridzi 2009). Agency is an individual’s socio-culturally mediated capacity to act (Rajan 2011:19), but this implies “unconventional, independent or emancipatory actions or practices of individuals who are oppressed or severely constrained” (Parker 2005:3). A person’s agency is dependent upon multiple social and cultural factors; at any one time there are both religious and social factors.

The Islamic resurgence in Malaysia that came with the rise of political Islam emphasised women’s reproductive roles and connection (if not confinement) to the home. This entrenched gendered identities based on Muslim ‘ideals’ and further ensconced mothers as homemakers and Islamic educators (Ong 1995). Financial maintenance was contingent upon a wife’s obedience to her husband; a form of economic guardianship (McLarney 2011). In a 2019 survey of 675 women across Malaysia, it was found that the women believed that they were duty-bound to obedience and confor-

mance in order to be a ‘good wife’. In a marriage relationship, 97 per cent agreed that they must obey their husbands and take care of their children (Sisters in Islam 2019).

The ISIS discourse also highlights the obligation of a woman to obey her husband, a duty as important as prayer, fasting and giving charity. Obedience to a husband is deemed “a form of worship by which [a woman] can get closer to her creator”; she “does not fulfil her rights to her God until she fulfils those of her husband” (Europol 2019:15).<sup>10</sup>

In her seminal work on the politics of piety, Saba Mahmood (2005:182) describes how according to Islamic jurisprudence, a woman’s foremost duty after marriage “is to her husband and offspring... second only to her responsibility toward God” and how “obedience to one’s husband is an obligation to which every Muslim woman is bound” (ibid:179). Similarly in Malaysia, and in many Islamic communities worldwide, many women believe that their subordination to men is divinely ordained (Europol 2019), and that their submission is ‘natural’ because a man is physically ‘stronger’ (McLarney 2011:436). Inequalities or ‘injustices’ are not seen as such, because they are accepted “as legitimate behaviour patterns,” merely the ‘fate’ of women, or justified, because women’s needs “are less than men’s” (Deshmukh-Ranadive 2002:51).

In Malay society, a woman’s sense of self comes from being a “complementary family person... [and there are] complex and dynamic ways that women wield power over those under their control and influence”. Hence while hegemonic practices allocate men and women to different spheres, women are still primary actors in the negotiation of social meaning (Blackwood 2000:11).

Power refers to the relations that determine behaviour and is manifested when influence over another is intended, such as when an individual holds the acknowledged right to command, and this right is accepted by others (Deshmukh-Ranadive 2002). In Malay-Muslim society, while men hold unquestionable power in the public sphere, Malay-Muslim women resist (or demonstrate agency) by accepting gender roles, entrenching women’s centrality in the home (Nuraniyah 2018). This paper will show that some

---

10 Raja Rohana (1991) notes that contrary to subjugation, Islam improved the conditions of women during a time when “pre-Islam pagan Arab men regarded women as possessions to be bought, sold or inherited”. Sisters in Islam (SIS) also highlight other verses in the Quran that emphasise marital equality, love, compassion and justice. However, adat (tradition) and political Islam has led to laws that disadvantage Malay-Muslim women.

women use religion to achieve centrality; an illustration of what Parker (2005) describes as a woman being both a victim and an oppressor.

This section of the paper has described the theoretical basis of power relations in a Malay-Muslim home against the backdrop of societal and religious patriarchy. The rest of the paper will sketch the other components that enable a mother to perpetuate exclusivist teachings in the home.

### *The Multiple Roles of Malaysian Malay-Muslim Women*

According to Malaysia's Department of Statistics (2018), the Female Labour Participation Rate (FLPR) is 54.7 per cent. This means that more than half of Malaysian women<sup>11</sup> are gainfully employed. Roziah Omar notes that even as women's successes have increased, they maintained their own subordination through *adat* (tradition) and Islamic discourses in their acceptance of the man as the head of the household and their duties to "bear him children, look after the family, maintain her modesty as well as guard her sexuality and faithfulness" (2003:117).

These studies demonstrate that even as Malay-Muslim women can achieve professional success, they voluntarily accede to domestic expectations to "fulfil their family obligation to be perfect wives and mothers" (Zuraini Jamal@Osman 2015:8) based on the belief that this is what tradition and Islam have dictated for them. They assuage their struggles with the understanding that they will be rewarded in the afterlife and that "reward will be in accordance with the degree of hardship" (Europol 2019:11).

### *Increasing Islamic Conservatism in Malaysia*

Several studies have traced the advent of a more conservative brand of Islam in Malaysia. Chandra Muzaffar (1987:2) described the effort to "re-create an Islamic ethos, an Islamic social order, at the vortex of which is the Islamic human being, guided by the Quran and the Sunnah"; most visibly

---

11 Malaysia has a multi-racial society of which the majority are Malays. By definition in the constitution, anyone who is Muslim can be determined to be 'Malay' as long as he/she speaks the Malay language and practices Malay customs (Malaysian Federal Constitution, Article 160). In reality, however, the Muslim population is made up of a diaspora of ethnicities (not just Malays). This paper focuses only on Malay-Muslim women.

obvious in the prevalence of religiously sanctioned attire and strict separation between the sexes. Marina Mahathir has also commented on increasing Arabisation in Malaysia, stemming from the belief that “the more like Arabs you are, the better Muslim you are”.<sup>12</sup>

Ahmad Fauzi (2016) traced the Salafisation of Malaysian Islam to increased engagement with Saudi Arabia and acceptance of Salafi principles into mainstream Sunni Islam, with an overarching (and now increasingly explicitly stated) goal of achieving Islamic statehood. He identifies the sources of political Islam to a generation of Islamic religious teachers, who subscribe to Salafi theological concepts, the acceptance of Salafi theology as standard texts in private and public religious schools and the entry of Salafi-leaning bureaucrats into JAKIM, the civil service and politics. Mohamed Nawab (2017) points out that even as there is increasing interest in and top-level support for Sufism in Malaysia, there is clear evidence of interest in ‘neo-Salafism’ given huge attendance numbers at neo-Salafists’ seminars and other events.

A 2013 Pew Survey found that 86 per cent of Malaysian Muslims surveyed were in support of Sharia Law, with 35 per cent believing that Sharia is the word of God. While 63 per cent of the respondents indicated concern about religious extremism, 31 per cent pinpointed Christian extremism as the problem. These results suggest that Sharia Law is not equated with extremism and that when extremism is mentioned, it is observed in the ‘other’ but not in a respondent’s own community or faith. A 2015 Pew Global Attitudes Survey found that 48 per cent of Malaysians surveyed were concerned about Islamic extremism – but 11 per cent of all respondents reported that they were in support of IS. In a Merdeka Centre study of Muslim youth in Southeast Asia (2011), more than 70 per cent of Malaysian youth surveyed want the Quran to replace the Federal Constitution and more than 80 per cent identified themselves as Muslims first, before their race or nationality.

Even after having taken into account the potential bias of survey respondents only providing answers that depict them in more socially-acceptable (i.e. Islamic) light, the figures are jarring. The trend of increasing radicalisation is also reflected in the number of arrests of those exhibiting support for IS or attempting to join the cause. Between 1967 and 2015, Malaysia’s Special Branch identified 22 home-grown militant groups dominated by ex-Afghan *mujahideen* returnees (Tan 2019:178). With the rise of IS, a steady stream of Malaysians has been recruited. Over the last two years, 519

---

12 Free Malaysia Today, 25 November 2017.



individuals have been arrested for terrorism-related charges in Malaysia, 100 have travelled to Syria and other IS-controlled territories and 40 have been killed in battle (Singh 2020). Other IS sympathisers travelled to Marawi in the Philippines to assist with the establishment of an Islamic State there. Analysts and the Minister of Defence himself have noted the increased threat of terrorism and extremism which is “on the rise”.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note the number of women in support of IS. The Special Branch was reported to have expressed concern about the “marked increase of local women”, who joined IS in the belief that they would be awarded with “strapping good-looking Middle Eastern husbands, fighting in the name of Islam” (Samuel 2016:64). In May 2018, a Malaysian housewife was among 15 people arrested. She had plans to launch attacks on non-Muslims by running them down in her car during the 14<sup>th</sup> General Elections, as well as to crash into non-Muslim places of worship using a gas cylinder as a detonator.<sup>14</sup> Liow and Arosaie (2019:89) note that ten families were amongst those who travelled to Syria and Iraq.

This section has illustrated the backdrop of increasing extremism and support for the IS cause. The following section will highlight additional identities that women embody as mothers and mother-figures as well as juxtapose the Malay stereotype of men in contrast to those roles.

### *Gendered Expectations and a Mother's Empowerment*

#### *Understanding Men*

A gendered analysis requires the examination of both men and women. In her study of urban women and their practices of Islam, Sylvia Frisk (2009:170) took note of the accepted underlying assumptions of male behaviour. In her observation of this upper-middle class community, she saw that men were described as the weaker sex, and more prone to giving in to their *nafsu* (desires). Women, on the other hand, had no problems with self-control (Frisk 2009:171). IS propaganda also highlights the tendency of a man to wander, when they say that “women must know that men were not created to remain confined to the home with their wives and children” (Europol 2019:15).

---

13 Kaur. Free Malaysia Today, 2 December 2019.

14 Rodzi. Straits Times, 1 June 2018.

Raja Rohana outlined the differences between the childhood training of a boy and a girl: whereas the “daughter’s days of childhood freedom before she takes on the duties of a ‘responsible daughter’ is brief”, the son “is allowed to enjoy a carefree freedom until such time when he takes over the family responsibility” (1991:18). My observations of men’s and women’s treatment in rural communities over a decade also had parallels to this – it seemed to be unsurprising that men would partake in illegal or immoral activities, but a woman was always deemed to be above and beyond this. Young boys were also given the freedom to play (often well into adulthood), while girls were assigned housework duties early on, and expected to quickly get married and bear children as this was their primary role in life. Further education or career success is seen as secondary, and at times, unnecessary or undesirable for females.

### *The Mother is Pure and Perfect*

In Malaysian popular culture, modern media depictions of the mother in daytime television drama, songs and folklore emphasise her self-sacrificing qualities, long-suffering burden of child-bearing and raising and the imperative that lies with the children to forever return that sacrifice with unwavering loyalty, devotion and care. Attaining motherhood is seen as a necessary rite of passage and the primary goal of every Malay-Muslim woman. Her untold happiness in being able to bear a child is used in an analogy for happiness in the proverb:

...*sebagai emak mandul baru beranak*. (... like a barren mother who is finally able to bear children).<sup>15</sup>

Popular Malay media (radio, television and social media) adds to the overarching belief (97 per cent of all women surveyed by SIS) that “a child is a blessing (*rezeki*), and having many children is a way of God blessing me (*bagi rezeki*)” (2019:27). This implies that if a woman is unable to bear children, she has not received God’s blessings. For some, being able to bear a child (and if possible, more than one) means being able to add to the Muslim population (*umma*), a commendable act (Saili and Saili 2018).

According to IS, contraception to prevent childbirth is “but a disease brought by our enemies, so that the number of Muslims decreases” (Eu-

---

15 Common proverb used in Malay conversations, translation provided by the author.

ropol 2019:21). The true role of Muslim women, thus, is to get married, give birth and raise children. IS discourse also emphasises a women's purity and the nobility of her domestic role as mother, spouse or sister of the soldiers of jihad.

### *Mothers as the Pathway to Heaven*

For a single Malay-Muslim woman, marriage lifts her from the bottom rung of the social ladder where every sin is borne by her father and other male relatives who are deemed responsible for her. Yet in marriage, the common cultural trope is "*syurga di bawah tapak kaki suami*" (heaven is under the feet of your husband) – in line with the understanding that a woman's job is to obey her husband's every word. When she has borne children, however, even as she still remains under the 'control' of her husband, she is 'empowered' by the belief that for her children, "*syurga di bawah tapak kaki ibu*" (heaven is under the feet of their mother). This belief is supported by a number of hadiths such as:

"The Prophet Muhammad said (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him): your Heaven lies under the feet of your mother." (Ahmad, Nasai).

"God has forbidden for you to be undutiful to your mothers". (Sahih Al-Bukhari).

"A man once consulted the Prophet Muhammad about taking part in a military campaign. The Prophet asked the man if his mother was still living. When told that she was alive, the Prophet said" "[Then] stay with her, for Paradise is at her feet." (Al-Tirmidhi).<sup>16</sup>

---

16 These hadiths were found online at (<https://www.soundvision.com/article/the-quran-and-hadith-on-mothers>), accessed 21 October 2019, and are taken at face value by the writer; they have not been verified through Islamic means as valid or correctly interpreted, however, these are the common tropes used and repeated to strengthen the belief that the pathway to heaven is through a mother.

*The Mother is the Bastion of Religion in the Home*

While it may seem contrary to the understanding of patriarchal Malay society and Islam, the above discussion of the weakness of men as well as the expectation of self-control and purity of women lends itself to the belief that mothers are the bastions of religion in the home. It is within domestic power dynamics that a woman is able to expand her space of influence and attempt to balance externally-imposed inequalities (Deshmukh-Ranadive 2002). Frisk noted that the women she studied had an overwhelming desire to “submit to the will of a transcendental God”, and that this submission required a “transformation in the husband’s religious behaviour and attitude” (2009:187). A woman’s ability to evolve her husband into a better Muslim allows her to first follow in the ideology, and secondly demonstrates her agency in exerting influence over her husband and children (Von Knop 2007). This is one way in which women resist the patriarchy and become empowered.

In a workshop by Farhat Naik, wife of the Indian Islamist preacher and Malaysian permanent resident Zakir Naik, on how to raise ‘Noble Generations’<sup>17</sup>, she emphasised that women are the “fortress against the devil” and that women need to “protect our husbands from the whisper of the Satan”. She then tells the audience that if they are able to make their child love them, the child is their [Islamic] “missionary throughout – developing the love for God has to be done by the mother”.

The central role of women under IS is to partake in *hijrah* (to travel from ‘Abodes of War’ (*dar al-kufr*: infidel states) to ‘Abodes of Islam’ (*dar al-Islam*: the Islamic State), where they are free to practise the religion in its entirety (Li 2016; Europol 2019:9). *Hijrah* is deemed to be obligatory (CPRLV 2016); and women are drawn by the promise of an Islamic ‘utopia’, where they have a central and supportive role (Pearson 2015; CPRLV 2016). Once there, they are to raise “good Jihadis”<sup>18</sup> a task deemed to be within a woman’s “field of honour” (Gentry and Sjöberg 2015:73), and the best thing for her to do as a “righteous wife” (CPRLV 2016:48). She is showered with praises for this endeavour and told that she is “the

---

17 The workshop by Farhat Naik, ‘Women’s Movement for Creating Noble Generations’ was held on 12 October 2019 in Kota Damansara, Selangor.

18 This is mostly perpetuated through the online al-Khansaa magazine, whose audience are women empathetic to the ISIS cause. Also see Von Knop (2007), Gentry and Sjöberg (2015), CPLRV (2016), Nuraniyah (2018), Lahoud (2014), Europol (2019) and Khalil (2019).

hope of the *umma*<sup>19</sup> and that her honour lies in “being a producer of jihadis” (Europol 2019:9; Tarras-Wahlberg 2018).

In IS discourse, women are approached as “mothers and scholars, wives and motivators of men” (Pearson 2015:19). She is tasked with educating her children “to that which Allah loves” (Von Knop 2007:410) or put simply, in jihadist ideology (Khalil 2019). But IS differentiates itself from other radical groups by emphasising the education of women as an avenue for their self-development; she is told that she has the responsibility to ensure a good grounding in Islam and is chastised for believing that she cannot understand the Quran without the help of a scholar (Europol 2019:28). This is touted as Female Jihadism; a feminine interpretation of religion for women’s empowerment,<sup>20</sup> through which a woman is able to spur their “husbands, sons, brothers” to jihad (Lahoud 2014:783). The belief is that if “a woman is convinced of something, no one will spur a man to fulfil it like she will ... behind every great *mujabbeedin* stood a woman” (Von Knop 2007:406).

This section has highlighted the multiple identities that Malay-Muslim mothers have within the domestic sphere, and commonalities those roles have with that of women under the IS regime. There is universality in the importance of motherhood and as the above examination has shown, contrary to popular assumptions, it is the mother that is the key source of religious education in the home. The following section details the results of the on-ground research and its parallels to the discussion above.

### *Findings from the Field*

The stimulus for this study came from rural communities, where I observed the treatment of women under patriarchal norms. Misogyny restricting women’s movements, decisions and actions not only came from husbands, fathers, brothers and sons, but also from women themselves; either in the form of controls inflicted by a mother on her daughter, or by peers and relatives, who chastise other females for choices that do not abide by patriarchal norms.

In contrast to that, however, there were many signs that women worked within the constraints to establish personal power centres in the home. One approach was to entrench Malay *adat* in terms of ritual practices and

---

19 *Umma* refers to the global Muslim community.

20 As opposed to Islamic Feminism, which is deemed sacrilegious.

reminders of the importance of a mother. A mother ensures that she is the centre of attention by constantly holding family feasts and celebrations tied to cultural or religious practices and requiring that her offspring and spouse are present; thus emphasising her centrality in the home. When there is nothing to celebrate, the mother reminds her family of her importance through daily contact through social media; forwarding images or short dramatic videos on the consequences of disobeying a mother (illness, accidents and other misfortune), story-telling or mealtime discussions of moral takeaways from daytime television dramas (often along the same lines as the social media videos) and the need to always remember her sacrifices for her children. All of these are underlined with religious undertones, obligations or consequences.

Not unlike the women in Frisk's study (2009), the rural women I observed tried to ensure that their spouses pray regularly and attend religious ceremonies. They also constantly remind their children to fulfil their religious requirements, be it prayer, giving to charity or fasting. Often heard tropes in the villages are as follows (translated verbatim):

“If you don't do as God wants us to do [fulfil religious requirements], you will prevent me from going to heaven as I will bear your sins.”

“Your path to heaven is through me, so if you don't do as I say [fulfil religious requirements] you will not get to heaven.”

“The best way for you to get to heaven is to work hard so that you can save money so that we [the parents] can go to *haji* [pilgrimage], this is the duty of all children.”

Most of the children that I observed took these messages to heart and often attributed misfortune to their not following the orders of their mother, or were sharing social media posts about her importance and gratitude for all her child-raising suffering. These observations indicate that the mothers are successful in the exertion of control over offspring.

Amongst peers or female relatives, daily chatter often revolves around how well children or grandchildren are able to recite the Quran, pray or fast; who amongst them had taken the virtuous step of sending their children to Islamic schools or won scholarships to Islamic education abroad; or which of their daughters has married the next eligible religious person in the village. Pride was expressed in how they are able to control their spouses in making them fast or pray, or in preventing him from spending time with his friends every evening, and instead have him stay at home to teach the children prayer, or at least send them to religious classes. At

times it seemed to be a competition to see who held the next religious feast (*kenduri*) and which groups from the Islamic missionary schools (*tahfiz*) were invited to recite prayers at those events. Empowerment for these women came from peer or relative recognition of their religious successes in this way; being able to bring the family closer to God is an indication of personal achievement and status.

In speaking to gender and radicalisation experts on the possibility of these rural scenarios resulting in the spread of intolerant, exclusivist attitudes (should the mothers inadvertently listen to the wrong preachers), I was redirected to urban areas, where this was already happening.

### *In the Urban Centres*

In wealthy upper-middle class neighbourhoods around Kuala Lumpur, many women attend *usrabs* (study circles) to improve their understanding of religion. Frisk observed these meetings in her research, and noted that they often comprised women who had retired or abandoned their careers to focus on religion. Not unlike the ritual feasts and other events arranged by rural mothers, these were important social events and “arenas for competing claims by groups of pious women as to how to be good Muslims” (2009:158). These study circles served the same affirmative purpose: an individual’s presence at the events indicated their piety and commitment to God. The urban women studied by Frisk also hosted collective community rituals as a public demonstration of their religious agency.

These sessions were often hosted by wealthy individuals, with popular non-Malaysian preachers, who would at times remind their hosts that a contribution to the Islamic cause (by hosting the event, which also serves as a channel for the collection of donations for various Islamic charities) would earn them merit and offset any sins or extravagance they may have had in their lives.<sup>21</sup> With many of the hosts nearing or in retirement, concerns about the afterlife loom large. Not unlike those I observed in rural areas, these events seemed to be a competition; the contest centred on how

---

21 For this section in particular, information on the community prayer events came from an individual whose family members hosted popular preachers for the community. Interview conducted on 23 July 2019 in Petaling Jaya. Information on the women’s-only study circles came from research collaborator Vilashini Solmiah in Kuala Lumpur over a series of meetings in July, September and October 2019.

lavish the events were, what food was provided, and how much in donations were collected.

The highlight of urban *usrabs* was the fund-raising activity. While some of this is instigated by Islamic social media influencers,<sup>22</sup> others are encouraged by the guest preacher. The women were often told that as they are too old to perform *hijrah*, the best way to support the Islamic cause was to donate to it. In these *usrabs*, women were urged to contribute online (through their phones) during the session, and donations were projected onto a screen in real time. The informants mentioned that tens of thousands of Malaysian Ringgit could be collected in this way. While these contributions were requested to ‘defend Islam’, the women did not ask where the money was going; their only interest was to demonstrate how generous they were in the name of Islam.<sup>23</sup>

Aside from raising jihadi offspring, IS discourse also highlights the importance of women as fundraisers; “she is a female Jihad warrior who wages jihad by means of funding jihad” (Von Knoop 2007:410; Lahoud 2014:790; Nuraniyah 2018:905).<sup>24</sup>

Other means of demonstrating superiority among urban women was their ability to access popular preachers online; a woman’s internet/technological savvy enabled her to broaden her knowledge beyond Malaysia’s borders. Nuraniyah (2018) noted that the internet enabled women’s activism in extremist groups; it served as a new space for women’s voices and an area where women could circumvent the patriarchy and state restrictions on information. There are no controls over the information that is spread through these channels.

While the study circles provide a sense of belonging to women in search of answers, there are also virtual sisterhoods that provide support for the jihadist cause. Von Knop (2007) writes of the Radical Sisterhood which has

---

22 These were said to be Malaysian women who had moved overseas, and were of the government-approved Sunni school of thought, but by virtue of being overseas and having access to a wider breadth of religious knowledge (given JAKIM’s restrictions within Malaysia), held great influence over local women.

23 Another informant who conducts anti-terrorism research for a government agency mentioned that collections after religious seminars hosted by large Malaysian corporations for their staff are also known to be channelled towards terrorism funding – these collections also leverage on an individual’s need to demonstrate their commitment to the Islamic cause. Interview conducted on 16 October 2019. Nuraniyah (2018) reports on Indonesian female migrant workers’ support of terrorism by purchasing flight tickets for jihadis and financing terror attacks.

24 This is in contrast to the actual meaning of the concept of financial jihad as discussed in footnote 4.



representatives all over Europe and a strong online presence. Groups like these discuss ideological issues and provide advice on how to best educate children and persuade husbands to follow the ‘right’ practices. They provide guidance for women in difficulty and an Islamic solution to ease problems and tension – a welcoming community that gives a voice to women and are often openly supportive of the IS cause. They promote “the dream of living a pure, true Islam” and create an online echo chamber that has infrequent dissent due to a self-reinforcing group logic, which then encourages participants to isolate themselves from those who are not part of the ‘sisterhood’ (Pearson 2015; CPRLV 2016).

Observations of Farhat Naik’s seminar to a group of upper-middle income women in Kota Damansara, Selangor were indicative of group behaviour as examined through social movement theory (Borum 2011). Similar to those who join online sisterhood forums (CPRLV 2016), the women in attendance at the seminar were seeking answers, and possibly going through periods of vulnerability (as indicated by the comments and questions they asked after the session).<sup>25</sup> They had issues that they needed help dealing with (the context from which the process of radicalisation cannot be separated from), and were open to views that would help them solve their problems. They decided that religion would be the source of those answers, and in joining these groups were able to identify with the messages given – the group’s narrative and ethos made sense to them. As the women accepted the group’s frames of reference, they began to identify with those they engaged with and with group socialisation were indoctrinated into the movement (i.e. the more exclusivist, neo-Salafi approach to Islam).

Feminist researchers often argue that women are unjustly denied their agency to act for political purposes by associating their actions with emotions, a need to be part of an in-group or as mere followers of a cause (Mil-

---

25 It is interesting to note that the women attending this workshop seemed needier and uncertain of the teachings of Islam. They were looking for solutions to their problems and were willing to accept and believe everything that the speaker put forward – especially as she peppered her presentation with quotations from the Quran in Arabic (with no translation). In contrast, the women at the Sisters In Islam conference (October 2019), who appeared to be from the same socio-economic class as those who attended the Kota Damansara workshop were not in search of answers; they knew where the verses that they could refer to in the Quran were, and discussed them at length (in English). These women were fully aware of the rights that Islam accorded them and had a deep understanding of the faith but used the session to share experiences and learn from each other in their efforts to improve human rights through Islam.

let 1971; Lloyd 1993; Grosz 1994; Prokhovnik 1999). However, a woman exhibits agency in deciding to join a group to learn more or act in the name of religion (Morgan 1989). Nuraniyah reported that the women she observed are active seekers of religious knowledge and try various venues before opting to follow Salafi preachers, because their sessions are frequently peppered with Quranic verses and deemed “more intellectual... [and] a better source of knowledge” (2018:900).

Of the sessions around Kuala Lumpur, my informants mentioned that some of the participants they were in touch with eventually refused further contact, as they had been advised by their teachers to stay away from those outside the *usrabs*. Other informants noted the increasing religiosity of friends, who were involved in these sessions, and who then either disappeared from social media or only post extremely religious content, alienating former friends and contacts.<sup>26</sup> This behaviour is emblematic of Salafi approaches as they encourage isolation from those who are non-Muslim or inadequately Muslim (Kruglanski et al. 2014).

Other informants talked about the content of the urban *usrabs*.<sup>27</sup> The idea of the wider Muslim *umma* is often invoked. One participant mentioned that in her session, the preacher said “we are one *umma*, and when one part of the *umma* is hurt [such as in Syria], it is like a part of our body – when one arm hurts, the other will feel the pain. So we must stop that pain – and you must encourage your husbands and sons to go fight for the cause”.<sup>28</sup>

Farhat Naik encouraged the raising of children “overflowing in their love of Allah,” she recommended that the women tell their children stories of “the warriors of Islam” and their successes (not unlike IS recommendations to tell bedtime stories of martyrs (Khalil 2019)). While she did not focus on pooling contributions from the audience, Farhat Naik implored them to donate even the smallest amount “in the way of Allah” as “cleans-

---

26 These informants provided links to preachers that their friends followed and described behavioural changes in those who got involved with more exclusivist versions of Islam (their deduction based on what they saw being posted online). Interviews were conducted on 24 and 25 July in Shah Alam and Kota Damansara.

27 These informants had attended these sessions and related what they observed. Some also commented on friends who had become more religious (and usually were their entry to the sessions they attended). Most lost touch with the women, who initially brought them into the *usrabs*, as they themselves dropped out of the study sessions.

28 Interview conducted on 26 July 2019 in Bangi, Selangor.

ing ourselves and our wealth guarantees success” and “purifying our wealth brings us closer to Allah”.

In her study of extremist preachers such as Zakir Naik,<sup>29</sup> Vilashini Solmiah observed that they are successful in luring their audiences, because they begin their sessions with more benign, moderate matters. Hence if a session is three hours long, the first two hours will endear the audience with well-balanced content, widely citing religious texts and convincing them that the preacher is moderate and knowledgeable. The subsequent hour then slides into pointing out how the preacher has often been victimised, invoking sympathy and anger (as the audience is already convinced of his positive qualities). The preacher then points out the common qualities of those who have an agenda against him. He notes that they are all non-Muslims, then the more exclusivist, intolerant trope begins – neatly persuading those listening to him to be more wary and less trusting of those who do not believe as they do (or have been taught to believe by the preacher). I saw the same traits in other online preachers’ sessions and at Farhat Naik’s talk. Towards the end of her session, she added stories of how detractors were abusing their family and how Muslims had to rise to help those who are oppressed worldwide.

Intolerance of other faiths was also evident on at least two occasions. One informant mentioned that the centre responded to a question on whether class continued on a public holiday with “we do not acknowledge Deepavali”.<sup>30</sup> During the session by Farhat Naik, a girl, not older than 15 years, asked how to explain to her friends that music is not allowed in Islam (a highly conservative interpretation of the faith). Farhat Naik responded that if she was speaking to non-Muslims about Islam, she needs to begin with other topics that are easier to convey. The girl’s bewildered response was “but I am Muslim, I don’t have non-Muslim friends”. These are examples of the exclusivist, intolerant interpretation of Islam that is being practiced and disseminated.

The presence of all-women *usrabs*, online sisterhood forums and sessions such as those by Farhat Naik demonstrate that it is women inviting

---

29 Spouse of Farhat Naik mentioned in earlier section.

30 In Malaysia, conservative preachers remind the public that they are not to wish others on their major festive holidays (such as Christmas or Deepavali) as it reduces their own faith and makes them apostate; Muslims are only to wish other Muslims on their own religious occasions. New Year celebrations are also deemed a Christian celebration. Hence to ‘not acknowledge’ Deepavali could be a continuation of this line of thought or a complete disavowal of any other faith but Islam as is taught in Salafi beliefs. Interview conducted on 12 October 2019.

other women to the Islamic cause. Other informants disclosed intelligence on a number of high-profile female recruits and recruiters; it was clear that the young teenagers at Farhat Naik's session were there with their elders.

Kinship relations and multi-generational jihadi families are not uncommon. Hwang and Schulze (2018) trace how Indonesian jihadis are drawn into the cause by female relatives, parents and teachers, growing into a jihadi community from birth. It is clear then that mothers who (intentionally or otherwise) follow a more exclusivist interpretation of Islam can and will teach that version to their offspring. Darul Islam<sup>31</sup> had a women's *dakwah* (education) wing that focused on women's recruitment and education (Nuraniyah 2018). Famous female IS militants played central roles in recruiting women online by blogging idyllic stories of the Islamic State and *hijrah* to encourage other Muslims to join the cause (Jamestown Foundation 2019).

### *Returning to the Rural Fringes*

While the rural communities I observed in Johor did not have lavish women-only home-based study, women gathered at mosques for religious classes. Social events, too, served to share gossip, demonstrate piety and negotiate social standing through religious achievements. In the southwest of Johor, local informants told me that the preachers at these sessions are all Malaysian, as any outsider would be too obvious in a closed and somewhat xenophobic community such as this.<sup>32</sup> Online preachers that are followed are mainly those that the Johor Queen, who is known to be more inclusive and progressive in her views on Islam, posts on her Facebook and Instagram pages.

However, a top-down directive on the 'acceptable' form of Islam does not guarantee that a state's citizens will necessarily follow suit. The Johor Survey (Chong et al. 2017) showed a deviance between the Sultan's and respondents' views on Islam, and it is possible that a more conservative

---

31 An earlier incarnation of Jemaah Islam, whose followers then evolved into ISIS supporters in Indonesia.

32 These observations were taken in Johor, a state where the country's main Islamic political party (PAS) is not seen in positive light as a result of the Johor Sultan's disapproval of their approach to Islam. There is great respect for the Johor royal family in this community, and as a result, Johor Muslims are often duty-bound to follow in royal footsteps, when it comes to religion. Interviews conducted on 6 and 25 September in Johor.

brand of Islam has permeated the ground. Online preachers are easily accessible and a drive through local villages and suburbs reveals myriad advertisements for seminars by preachers in full religious garb, but promoting content that does not seem as inclusive as the messages from the royal palace.

Given the prevalence of patriarchy in rural societies, it is not unlikely that local women might begin to take up a more 'feminine' approach to Islam that empowers them to study the Quran on their own, in addition to buttressing their knowledge so that they can better guide their families on the rightful religious path. Vilashini pointed out that urban *usrabs* have become a benchmark that rural women aspire to. As there are no boundaries to accessing online Islamic influencers or preachers (notwithstanding their respect for their royalty), conditions on the ground could change. As it is, over the last 12 years of my immersion in this community, more Islamic missionary schools have sprung up. Some parents have pulled their children out of government schools to put them in a *tahfiz* full-time. While they are not the majority, there are also increasing numbers of youth dressed in the 'religious' attire of turbans, robes and full-faced veils.

### *Connecting the Dots*

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that Malaysian Malay-Muslim women who are faced with the pressures of patriarchy in the public sphere, and, who, by tradition and religious beliefs, are pressured into leaving professional successes at the door to tend to domestic duties, may find an outlet for personal empowerment and peer recognition through religion. A gendered analysis of the roles and identities of women (and men) in the home has shown that a woman can gain power by wielding religion as a tool to control or influence her family. This paper does **not** claim that given the increasing accessibility and emerging acceptability of exclusivist Salafi teachings, everyone (especially mothers) are on the road to becoming suicide bombers or jihadi soldiers.

It is also important to note the difference between Salafi and Salafi-jihadi ideology; Salafi interpretations are strict declarations that the "smallest deviation [is] tantamount to *shirik* or polytheism and there is an obsession with Islamic purification". Salafi jihadism, on the other hand, aims to "replace the secular political system with an Islamic one through armed revolution... [while] purification only concerns religious matters – i.e. ridding Islam of superstitions" (Nuraniyah 2018:901). Many Salafis, in not wanting

to be associated with terrorism, decry the antics of Salafi-jihadis – as they do in Malaysia.<sup>33</sup>

Ahmad Fauzi (2016) has outlined how, in spite of the political rhetoric and denials, much of mainstream Islam in Malaysia has already adopted Salafi views that “purportedly paves the way to violence” (Ahmad Fauzi 2016:21). Samuel also highlights how certain radicalised narratives provides the “mood music” for acts of terrorism, and that some non-violent radical groups can be “conveyor belts” to violent extremism as “religious extremism is inherently violent” (2016:75).

However, Liow and Arosaie (2019) posit that because Malaysia already functions as a de facto Islamic nation (although the constitution states otherwise) given the constitutionally-defined preferential treatment to Malay-Muslims, the Islamic bureaucracy helmed by JAKIM, the supremacy of political Islam and political parties’ attempts at proving their ‘Islamic credentials’, there is little real need for Malaysians to support IS. The lure of IS lies in its counter-narrative to non-Islamic nations, especially where Muslims are a minority. In Malaysia where there is already an Islamic hegemony, outright support for IS, *hijrah* and radicalised violence is reduced.

The idea that mothers would perpetuate exclusivist and extremist theology to their family has been hard to swallow largely because mothers are believed to be a “peace-making ally against violence” (Winterbotham and Pearson 2016); that they would not have the political mettle or agenda to support extremism (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015); and that “killing is an unnatural female behaviour” (Åhäll 2012). It was for these reasons that the United Kingdom’s counter-terrorism strategy, which was to rope in Muslim mothers to report on their children or other family members, if they were to join the IS cause, failed (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015; Winterbotham and Pearson 2016). The women would rather preserve the family unit and stability than report on a possible, but yet unproven, security threat.

It goes against the grain to believe that a mother is capable of evil. Rather, they are usually seen as victims of violence than perpetrators (Cunningham 2003). But the Surabaya bombings of 2018 have proven that it is possible.<sup>34</sup> Media reports have highlighted that, of those known to travel

---

33 Malay and Islamic political parties such as the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) and Malaysia’s Islamic Party (PAS) often disassociate themselves from terrorism and accuse each other of being Salafi, even as each attempts to demonstrate their Islamic credentials.

34 Since then there have been several more arrests of women in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia of plotting terror or charged as supporters of ISIS; comprising mothers or housewives, students and migrant workers.

from Southeast Asia to the Islamic State, it was “the daughters and wives in the group who were more determined than the men” (Jones 2018). Winterbotham and Pearson (2016) emphasise that it “would be wrong to assume that [supporters of Daesh] were always men”.

The above discussion has shown that all the factors that can contribute to a nest of extremist nurturing in the home are present. Rajan (2011) has written about Palestinian women who want to be “mothers of martyrs” as it gives them honour, glory and recognition. Gentry and Sjoberg point out that “mothering violent men is mothering no less” (2015:74). At the very least, as shown in the UK counter-terrorism failure, these mothers will not inform the authorities about family members’ intentions to participate in jihad. At the very worst, they will encourage it and give their blessings.

### *The Time is Now*

Given the physical collapse of the Islamic State, there are now many returnees waiting to be repatriated to their homelands, including Malaysia. A 2017 report by The Soufan Centre noted that at the time there were 91 Malaysians in ISIS ranks, of which 12 were women and 17 were children. Khalil (2019) points out that counterterrorism officials have been preparing for the return of male foreign fighters, but are hugely unprepared for returning women and children. Abdul Nasir points out that Malaysia’s de-radicalisation programme for male returnees is only one month long; women and children are deemed to “have had no decision-making powers over their migration to Syria” and are thus assessed on a case-by-case basis and monitored when allowed to return to their villages.<sup>35</sup>

Even as female returnees may claim to have been only housewives and mothers, Khalil (2019) points out that IS considers their female supporters “a key to their future survival,” and that some female returnees have declared that “even if we haven’t been able to keep [the Islamic State], our children will one day get it back”. Abdul Nasir warns that “racial and religious issues, especially those which can be exploited to suggest Islam is under threat in Malaysia, can be scavenged by IS to keep its radical ideology alive among potential extremists in the country”.<sup>36</sup> Today’s intensification of political Islam worsens the situation.

---

35 Nasir. Today Online, 24 September 2019. Also refer to Chan. Straits Times, 25 October 2017.

36 Nasir. Today Online, 24 September 2019.

It will take generations to reverse or remove patriarchal traditions, attitudes and behaviours (if this is at all possible), and it is impossible to monitor mothers within the home to determine what and how they are teaching their families about religion. But it could be possible to better monitor those who teach them, or those that they reach out to for religious knowledge.

D'Estaing (2017) notes that while women might be central to the spread (or prevention) of extremist teachings, the onus should not be placed solely on their shoulders, "good governance and the role of the state in preventing violent extremism... [and] social, economic, security initiatives [are required] to incite notable change". The Malaysian government needs to move beyond Islamic politics and begin work on improving conditions on the ground to ensure that exclusivist views of Islam that could be detrimental to Malaysian society at large, are not perpetuated in the home.

## References

- Abdul Nasir, A. 2019. "Countering the visible and potent threat of Islamic State in Malaysia". *Today Online*, 24 September 2019. (<https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/islamic-state-wants-stay-relevant-and-visible-malaysia-how-can-terror-threat-be-overcome>). Accessed 13 December 2019.
- Åhäll, L. 2012. "Motherhood, Myth and Gendered Agency in Political Violence". *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14(1): 103-120.
- Ahmad Fauzi A.H. 2016. *The Extensive Salafization of Malaysian Islam*. Trends in Southeast Asia 2016/9. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Bernard, H.R. 1994. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Blackwood, E. 2000. *Webs of Power*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Borum, R. 2011. "Radicalisation into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories". *Journal of Strategic Security* 4(4): 7-36.
- Centre for the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence (CPRLV). 2016. *Women and Violent Radicalization – Research Report*. Quebec: Conseil du Statu de la Femme.
- Chan, F. 2017. "ISIS Returnees Pose Major Terror Threat". *Straits Times*, 25 October 2017. (<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/isis-returnees-pose-major-terror-threat>). Accessed 27 July 2018.
- Chong, T., Lee, H.G., Saat, N., Rahman, S. 2017. *The 2017 Johor Survey: Selected Findings*. Trends in Southeast Asia 2017/20. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.



- Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE). 2019. "Challenging Hateful Extremism (Summary Version)". United Kingdom. ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/836540/Challenging\\_Hateful\\_Extremism\\_-\\_summary\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/836540/Challenging_Hateful_Extremism_-_summary_report.pdf)). Accessed 1 February 2020.
- Cunningham, K.J. 2003. "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 26: 171-195.
- d'Estaing, S.G. 2017. "Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism: Avoiding Instrumentalisation and Furthering Agency". *Gender & Development* 25(1): 103-118.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. 2018. "Statistics on Women Empowerment in Selected Domains". (<https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/pdfPrev&id=SGMzVDh0cVUwK0t6SGN6UzhwN1dmdz09>). Accessed 31 October 2019.
- Deshmukh-Ranadive, J. 2002. *Space for Power: Women's Work and Family Strategies in South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies.
- EUROPOL. 2019. "Women in Islamic State Propaganda: Roles and Incentives". *Europol Specialist Reporting*. (<https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/europol-specialist-reporting/women-in-islamic-state-propaganda>). Accessed 1 October 2019.
- Free Malaysia Today. 2017. "Marina: Saudis to Blame for Malaysia's 'Arabisation': Loss of Local Culture". 25 November 2017. (<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/11/25/marina-saudis-to-blame-for-malysias-arabisation-loss-of-local-culture/>). Accessed 28 May 2019.
- Frisk, S. 2009. *Submitting to God – Women and Islam in Urban Malaysia*. Copenhagen: Nias Press.
- Gentry, C.E. and Sjoberg, L. 2015. *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Thinking about Women's Violence in Global Politics*. London: Zed Books.
- Grosz, E. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Hwang, J.C. and Schulze, K.E. 2018. "Why They Join: Pathways into Indonesian Jihadist Organisations". *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30(6): 911-932.
- Institute of Policy Studies. 2008. "The Law of War and Concept of Jihad in Islam". *Policy Perspectives* 5(1), Islamabad. ([http://www.ips.org.pk/the-law-of-war-and-concept-of-jihad-in-islam/?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=560&Itemid=286#PolicyPerspectives](http://www.ips.org.pk/the-law-of-war-and-concept-of-jihad-in-islam/?option=com_content&task=view&id=560&Itemid=286#PolicyPerspectives)). Accessed 1 March 2020.
- Jamestown Foundation. 2019. "Women in Jihad: Militant Leadership Monitor Special Report – Personalities behind the Insurgency". (<https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Special-Report-Women-in-Jihad-2.pdf?x97873>). Accessed 1 October 2019.
- Jones, S. 2018. "Surabaya and the ISIS family". *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute. (<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/surabaya-and-isis-family>). Accessed 27 July 2018.

- Kamarulnizam A. and Mohd, Afandi S. 2015. "Conceptualizing Jihad among Southeast Asia's Radical Salafi Movements". *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 14(42): 2-28.
- Kaur, M. 2019. "Mat Sabu tables 10-year White Paper on Defence," *Free Malaysia Today*, 2 December 2019. (<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2019/12/02mat-sabu-tables-10-year-white-paper-on-defence/>). Accessed 15 December 2019.
- Kawulich, B.B. 2005. "Participant Observation as a data collection method". *Forum: Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung*, 6 (2), Article 43. (<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996>). Accessed 1 March 2020.
- Khalil, L. 2019. "Behind the Veil: Women in Jihad after the Caliphate". Lowy Institute ([www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/behind-veil-women-jihad-after-caliphate](http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/behind-veil-women-jihad-after-caliphate)). Accessed 31 October 2019.
- Kruglanski, A.W., Gelfand, M.J., Bélanger, J.J., Sheveland, A., Hetiarachchi, M. and Gunaratna, R. 2014. "The Psychology of Radicalisation and Deradicalisation: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism". *Advances in Political Psychology*, 3(1): 69-93.
- Lahoud, N. 2014. "The Neglected Sex: The Jihadis' Exclusion of Women from Jihad". *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(5): 780-802.
- Li, R. 2016. "A Preliminary Study on the 'Islamic State' Thought in Modern Islamism". *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 10(4): 20-38.
- Liow, J.C. and Arosai, A. 2019. "The Sound of Silence: Nuancing Religiopolitical Legitimacy and Conceptualising the Appeal of ISIS in Malaysia". *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 41(1): 86-113.
- Lloyd, G. 1993. *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Mahmood, S. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- McLarney, E. 2011. "The Islamic Public Sphere and the Discipline of Adab". *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43: 429-499.
- Merdeka Centre. 2011. "Values, Dreams, Ideals: Muslim Youth in Southeast Asia. Surveys in Malaysia and Indonesia". (<http://www.goethe.de/ins/id/pro/jugendstudie/REPORT%20Malaysias%20Final.pdf>). Accessed 7 July 2018.
- Millett, K. 1971. *Sexual Politics*. London: Granada Publishing Ltd.
- Mohamed Nawab, M.O. 2016. "The Islamic conservative turn in Malaysia: Impact and Future Trajectories". *Contemporary Islam*, 11: 1-20.
- Morgan, R. 1989. *The Demon Lover: The Roots of Terrorism*. London: Piatkus.
- Muzaffar, C. 1987. *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*. Selangor: Oxford Fajar.
- Neumann, P.R. 2013. "The Trouble with Radicalisation". *International Affairs*, 89(4): 873-893.
- Nuraniyah, N. 2018. "Not Just Brainwashed: Understanding the Radicalisation of Indonesian Female Supporters of the Islamic State". *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 30(6): 890-910.

- Omar, R. 2003. "Negotiating their Visibility: The Lives of Educated and Married Malay Women". In: Omar, R. and Hamzah, A., ed. *Women in Malaysia – Breaking Boundaries*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd.
- Ong, A. 1995. "State versus Islam: Malay Families, Women's Bodies, and the Body Politic in Malaysia". In: Ong, A. and Peletz, M.G., ed. *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Parker, L., ed. 2005. *The Agency of Women in Asia*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic.
- Pearson, E. 2015. "The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalisation, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad". *Policy Studies Organisation*: 1944-2866.
- Pew Research Centre. 2013. "Extremism Concerns Growing in West and Predominantly Muslim Countries". (<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/07/16/extremism-concerns-growing-in-west-and-predominantly-muslim-countries/>). Accessed 27 July 2018.
- Pew Research Centre. 2015. "Global Attitudes Spring 2015 Survey". ([https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/23/key-takeaways-on-how-the-world-views-the-u-s-and-china/country-survey-map\\_web/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/23/key-takeaways-on-how-the-world-views-the-u-s-and-china/country-survey-map_web/)). Accessed 27 July 2018.
- Prokhovnik, R. 1999. *Rational Woman*. London: Routledge.
- Rahman, S. 2018. "Should Malaysia Expect an Islamic Backlash?" *Perspective* 2018/54. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Rahman, S. and Lim, C. 2017. "To Fight Radicalisation in Southeast Asia, Empower the Women." *The Conversation*. (<https://theconversation.com/to-fight-radicalisation-in-southeast-asia-empower-the-women-79387>). Accessed 7 July 2017.
- Rajan, V.G.J. 2011. *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Rana, Muhammad Farooq. 2011. "Jihad: Perception & Reality". *Minhaj-ul-Quran International*. (<https://www.minhaj.org/english/tid/13819/Jihad-PerceptionReality.html>). Accessed 1 March 2020.
- Ridzi, F. 2009. "Private/ Public Sphere". In: O'Brien, J., ed. *Encyclopaedia of Gender and Society*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412964517.n343>). Accessed 10 June 2019.
- Rodzi, N.H. 2018. "Student, Housewife Among 15 Terror Suspects Held in Malaysia for Planning Attacks". *Straits Times*, 1 June 2018. (<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/student-housewife-among-15-terror-suspects-held-in-malaysia>). Accessed 27 July 2018.
- Rohana, R.R.M. 1991. *The Role and Status of Social and Legal Perspectives*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Saili, J. and Saili, A.P. 2018. "At Odds: Perceived Stigma of Single Professional Malay Women". *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Science* 8(14): 79-90.

- Samuel, T.K. 2016. *Radicalisation in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of Daesh in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines*. The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT). Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Singh, J. 2020. "IS Resilience in Southeast Asia?" *RSIS Commentary 20012*. Singapore: International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. (<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvtr/is-resilience-in-southeast-asia/#.XjaaQWgzY2w>). Accessed 30 Jan 2020.
- Sisters in Islam. 2019. *Perceptions and Realities: The Public & Personal Rights of Muslim Women in Malaysia*. Petaling Jaya.
- Tan, A.T.H. 2019. "Terrorism in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore – Challenge and Response". In: Schreer, B. and Tan, A.T.H., ed. *Terrorism and Insurgency in Asia – A Contemporary Examination of Terrorist and Separatist Movements*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Tarras-Wahlberg, L. 2016. *Promises of Paradise? A Study on Official ISIS-Propaganda Targeting Women*. Master's Thesis in Political Science. Swedish Defence University.
- Trip, S.; Bora, C.H.; Marian, M.; Halmajan, A. and Drugas, M.I. 2019. "Psychological Mechanisms Involved in Radicalization and Extremism. A Rational Emotive Behavioural Conceptualisation". *Frontiers in Psychology*. (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00437>).
- Von Knop, K. 2007. "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30(5): 397-414.
- Winterbotham, E. and Pearson, E. 2016. "Different Cities, Shared Stories". *The RUSI Journal* 161(5): 54-65.
- Zuraini Jamil@Osman. 2015. "Managing the Domestic Sphere: The Experiences of Malay Women in Dual-career Families". *Proceedings of the International Conference on Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences (ICSHSS'15)*, July 29-30 2015, Phuket.

# Chapter IV

## Conclusion



# Comparing Violence in Asia and Europe – A Contribution to Solving a Complex Problem

*La Toya Waha*

In the chapters of this volume, a variety of cases of violence in Asia and Europe as well as a diversity of explanations for violence have been presented. While violence and its emerging conditions stood in the focus, the presented cases transcended phenomenal domains and local particulars. The challenge the analyses pose to disciplinary foci and singular explanations may further the scientific discourse as well as the interdisciplinary exchange.

However, understanding the emergence of violence is not just of scientific interest. The relevance and the necessity to understand violence present themselves almost daily in the news. Not the least when we look at the consequences, the Islamist attacks in Sri Lanka in April 2019 had, the need for political decision makers' better understanding of the phenomenon becomes clear.

## *Relevance to Understand Violence beyond Science: The Impact of the Islamist Attacks 2019*

The need to understand violence better shall be shortly pointed out by looking at some of the consequences, the Islamist attacks in 2019 had for Sri Lanka. These include, among others, the outbreak of violence between different religious communities, the (re-)emergence of religious figures as political leaders and the likely societal conflict arising from the resulting contention about the values of the state, and the impact of the security issues' dominance on political decision making.

The aftermath of the Islamist attacks in Sri Lanka in April 2019 has seen rising influence of religious figures within the different communities. One of the most notable examples for this might be Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, archbishop of Colombo.<sup>1</sup> He took the lead of the Catholic community and became stylised as the 'Christian voice' in the emerging conflict. Although

---

1 This Week in Asia, 12 May 2019.

his calls for restraint and calm could not prevent retaliatory violence against Muslims in the regions where the attacks had happened, he became a key figure in criticising and commenting political decisions. While his critique of the government has not started with the attacks, he was heard much more than before. Even more, his suggestions for action as well as his frequent call for peace among the Sri Lankan people has gained him the trust beyond religious divides and led some to call for his presidency. These calls have not been heard; however, his influence in politics has significantly increased. While in the case of Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith a religious leader has emerged, who seems unlikely to mobilise on religious lines for political gains, his significant influence among the population and the calls for him to become president point towards the danger of conflating religious and political leadership. The merging of religious authority and political office prohibits the criticism of decisions made by the leaders, or the leaders' behaviour itself. A short perusal of Sri Lanka's history of Buddhist monks in politics serves as a case in point. Even beyond this, the centrality of religious figures in politics is prone to conflict in a society with adherents to diverse religions. The influence of a Christian figure is likely to provoke a response by radical Buddhists. Such tensions then do not remain between political agents. They spread into the community and thus might challenge the fragile trust between Christians and Buddhists which has rebuilt over decades. This development appears to prevent the shift from identity politics to ordinary politics. Religious figures in politics thus further, to use Mitra's terms, the *politics of the system* rather than *politics within the system*.

Moreover, in the consequence of the Islamist attacks, retaliatory attacks, violent clashes and counter-strikes involving members of the Muslim community have become more frequent. Conflicts, which started as disputes on Facebook, have escalated into violence between communities; people took 'justice' into their own hands, and attacked a mosque as demands to search the mosque for weapons have not been met; Muslim shops became target of angry crowds. While the government responded quickly and implemented diverse measures to end the violence – curfews, arrests, blocking of social media, to name a few – the tensions between the members of different communities remain. Religion has gained a new presence in the public sphere, and boundaries along religious lines are drawn more visibly since the Easter Sunday attacks.

After the Islamist attacks, the trust between the communities has further declined. So has the trust in Muslim politicians due to their alleged – and



confirmed – ties to the terrorists and their supporters.<sup>2</sup> The trust in Muslim politicians had been on a downward trend among the Muslim population before, enabling new actors to take the political lead of the community, at least in some parts of the country (Waha 2018:332f.). The trust by members of the Muslim community as well as the trust in Muslim politicians by members of the other communities has taken severe damage. As Muslim political parties have been long regarded as king/queen maker in Sri Lankan politics (Wickramasinghe 2014:198, 166, 381), the likely change in electoral support for Muslim parties can impact the power politics in Sri Lanka.

Even more, the Islamist attacks had an impact on the presidential elections which were held in November 2019. The allegations that members of the serving government, including the president and the prime minister, had not taken warnings by the Indian intelligence seriously, which could have prevented the deadly attack, the support for the then incumbent government coalition further declined.<sup>3</sup> Although the inability to uphold the functioning of the security apparatus and process of intelligence information have not been the first or sole reason for it, the handling of the threat, or better the lack thereof, has promoted the call for a strong leader, able to restore security and order in the country. As such, the attacks propelled the issue of security on the top of election campaigns and agendas. In the field of security and the dealing with terrorism, none of the presidential candidates could present as much experience and credentials as Gotabaya Rajapaksa, a central figure of the military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009. Yet, the issue of security has delegated the questions of good governance, reconciliation and distancing from China and its debt-trap to the sideline. And while Gotabaya Rajapaksa appears to be able to solve problems as a technocrat, his political career is accompanied by his elder brothers, most notably, former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, whose records for good governance, rule of law and accountability are not quite good (Goodhand 2013). The costs of bringing (indirectly) Mahinda Rajapaksa, who stands for authoritarian rule, nepotism and the sell-out of Sri Lanka to China, back to power were willingly taken for the sake of re-establishing security. While Gotabaya Rajapaksa has not won the elections just because of the attacks, his credentials as strong man and capable of bringing back security for some voters surely have tipped the scale.

---

2 See among others *The Diplomat*, 4 June 2019.

3 *The Guardian*, 24 October 2019.

Finally, the attacks have severely impacted one of Sri Lanka's central economic pillars – tourism. The numbers of tourists have significantly declined since the attacks and as such the income generated by tourism and tourism-related fields.<sup>4</sup> It has again not just been the attack, which had led the Sri Lankan economy to stumble – politicians' mismanagement and self-interest, such as during the political crisis at the end of 2018 (Echle 2018), had taken its toll on the Sri Lankan economy, too. But the attacks have furthered the decline of a successful income generator. This downward trend has continued, leading to one of the country's lowest growth rates, even underdoing those during the civil war. Thousands of substances have been destroyed.

The case of Sri Lanka shows that the relevance of understanding the way towards violence is not limited to science. Instead, the understanding of how violence of this kind emerges and thus the ability to act meaningfully – or the lack thereof – can have an impact on state and society – and thus potentially on the life of every individual. While the most obvious reason for politicians to care about potential counter-measures is the prevention of death, injury and destruction of citizens and property, it, too, is in their interest to prevent the negative consequences affecting far more than those, who lost their lives, their health or their loved ones in the attack itself. The spread of networks and ideologies accompanying the violence in one country may reach deep into the social structures and families elsewhere, facilitating and furthering violence in yet another country, as Rahman has shown above. Beyond that, developments in one country affect the spread of violence elsewhere. Clashes between members of different communities are frequently used politically to point to an emerging faultline war à la Huntington. Particularly the IS has drawn hundreds into its ranks with the narrative of a world-wide victimised community under threat and the constructed claims of large-scale discrimination and assault. McDonald has pointed out the importance of distant suffering in the individual's way towards engagement in violence. Moreover, as Barton and Gunaratna have shown in this volume, the conflict zones in one country facilitate the emergence of conflicts elsewhere.

As Sri Lanka and the cases presented above show, violence can severely challenge the fundamentals of states and societies, the complex social fabric, the trust among different communities within a country and beyond, and the retainment of nuances in politics – nationally, regionally, and globally.

---

4 The Diplomat, 31 July 2019.

Ill-conceived policies and uninformed political decisions might cut deep into the freedoms and rights of citizens and the rule of law and might go against the value fundamentals of the society as whole. As Croissant has pointed out in this volume, the potential “democratic backsliding” itself can further the spread of violence. Successful and unsuccessful means to rule-in radical and violent political agents have been shown on the examples of India and Pakistan by Mitra and Iqbal respectively in this book.

*But what lessons can be drawn from this volume about the way towards violence by non-state actors in general, and responses and means of prevention beyond single cases?*

To provide an answer has been the rationale behind the workshop, in which most of this volume’s authors and participants of the conference came together. In different sessions, one question respectively was discussed. Each session was led by a moderator, who came in as expert from a related field or discipline. In each session, the participants were divided into two groups. Each group independently from the other group answered the question given for the session. Thereby, the group members documented the thought- and group-discussion processes in writing. Thereafter, the groups exchanged their papers with the documented processes and discussed the given results. In the final part of the session, the treated points were discussed in plenum and the results of the debate – points on which the participants could agree upon – were collected by the moderator. This approach was an experiment and was supposed to get as much out of the interdisciplinary exchange as possible on the one hand, and out of the individual expertise and knowledge, on the other hand. Although this method cannot replace a systematic comparison of cases and disciplinary approaches, it can provide an overview over directions, research may take. The results of the two major sessions are given in the following.

### *Similarities and Differences*

The compared cases of violence applied by non-state actors differ in regional and cultural context, in timing as well as in ideological and/or religious background. However, there are elements the treated cases share.

First, the application of violence is intentional and serves a purpose. Violence is neither random, nor does it come out of nowhere. There is a process, even if of different length and intensity, which precedes the application of violence. Violence thus is not an outcome unplanned or unintended by the perpetrating agent but is used towards an end, result or aimed-at outcome. This finding thus goes against the framing of radicalisation – un-

derstood as the process towards violence – as “something done to a person” (see McDonald above). It ‘brings back’ the agency to individuals and groups involved in violence.

Second, the spread of violence takes place in a context, where violence is ‘normalised’, i.e. where the application of violence becomes the norm, rather than the exception. Such acceptance of violence thus allows for the spread of the use of violence for political and social ends. On the other hand, the rejection of violence and the lack of support for violent behaviour can negatively affect the strategic value of physical force, the supply with resources for violent actors as well as the incentives to join a violent campaign.

Third, the violence perpetrated is visible, and as such makes the agent visible. This stands in a sharp contrast to the invisible violence perpetrated in the domestic sphere or by certain states and regimes. The participants pointed towards the salient contrast between the visible attacks, such as in Sri Lanka, planned for the world to see, and clandestine violence hidden from the world’s eyes, such as in the Nazi regime. Thus, the message behind the violent act might give conclusions about the intended outcome.

Fourth, the cases share the importance of the interplay between the local and the global. Neither local nor global developments solely explain the emergence and continuation of violence in the presented cases. Instead, they suggest an interdependence between global and local events.

Fifth, the violence is related to (collective) identities – although of various kinds. These identities can be ‘filled’ by religion, ethnicity or secular ideologies as well as a peculiar combination thereof.

Sixth, the process of the emergence of violence involves all three levels, the micro, the meso and the macro – and all three levels matter in understanding the emergence of violence even in pronounced local, regional or global contexts. As such, the individual, the group or collective as well as the national and international structural and political conditions play into the process. Taking measures, thus, requires an encompassing approach, rather than the focus on ‘just’ one level.

Despite the similarities, the differences should not be neglected. The five major differences identified are the following. First, there are differences in what the violence is intended to do. Thereby, it can be differentiated mainly between *performative* violence and *instrumental* violence. While both kinds of violence are instrumental in terms of being a means towards an end, instrumental violence in this context refers to the means towards the end of physical destruction e.g. of critical infrastructure and opponents, while the performative violence seeks to achieve a more sym-

bolic end, such as conveying a message about the victim or the perpetrator or both.

Second, violence emerges in different contexts of interaction between state and non-state actors. At times violence emerges with state's support for non-state actors' behaviour, in other cases it emerges in the context of a state's repression of non-actors, and in yet other cases, it emerges in the context of contention between state and non-state actors. Furthermore, the relations between state and non-state actors differ in quality and origin – e.g. internal non-state actors vs. external or transnational agents.

Third, the question of 'who is to be blamed' for the use of violence is answered differently in different contexts. This refers both to the non-state actors' answer to the question as well as to the state's and societies' answer to it. However, differences therein can make a significant difference for the agents themselves as well as for their supporting environment.

Fourth, there are great differences in what was termed 'ideological cross-over support'. While there appear to be differences and similarities in ideological content in all of the cases, it appears that while some actors of different phenomenal domains have not been found to cooperate, others have appeared to be more likely to lend support to agents with other ideological backgrounds. It was found that extreme left-wing groups appear to be more likely to lend support – although counter-intuitive – to extremist religious groups than groups of the other phenomenal domains do to others.

Fifth, there are differences in identity lines, that is, how the lines of delineation towards other groups are drawn. Even in cases where groups nominally share a similar ideological background, identity lines can be differently defined and nuanced.

Disputed was whether the discussed cases shared the 'narrative of replacement'. While some argued that it only played a role in ethnic and religious phenomena, and mainly in the case of radicalisation of majorities, some claimed that this conviction could be found in groups with other (secular) ideological backgrounds as well.

### *Recommendations – How to Prevent Violence?*

It was found that there are similarities in the processes towards violence as well as the application of violence between the cases presented above. Some of the similarities lend themselves to the drawing of conclusions and recommendations of how to prevent violence in the context given in the book.

In general, the need to engage at all three levels (micro, meso and macro) at the same time and in a coordinated manner was pointed out. Due to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the radicalisation process, i.e. the way towards violence, the counters and responses to it need to be multi-dimensional as well. And as agents acting at the different levels matter, like individuals, friends, families, groups, transnational networks, politicians and international agents, those different agents need to be considered in political decisions. Focusing on one level only will not suffice to prevent and counter violence on the long run. It includes the targeting of individuals, groups and communities as well as international organisations and agents in measures to prevent and/or to end violence. In national measures for prevention, the major target groups were identified as the community, those on the path to radicalisation and those already involved in an act of terror. For the first two categories, the need for education, the need to build societal cohesion and the need to counter narratives of violence and their preachers were stressed. Thereby, particularly with regard to the role of the normalisation of violence in its spread, it is arguable that state-agents should seek to prevent the normalisation of violence and to uphold non-violent means of engagement within politics and the society. Laws against the spread of violent extremism as well as community responses to violent acts and violence-promoting messages were regarded as basic requirements.

For those, who already engaged in violence, there is the need to demonstrate the boundaries for their actions. If imprisoned, however, the necessities of educating prisoners in life-skills and non-violent means of problem solving and, if possible, providing prospects for reintegration into the society were pointed out.

The translation of these overriding recommendations into concrete measures, however, has met its limits in the diversity of political systems and societal values. For example, the state's role as social engineer was acknowledged, but its concrete meaning highly contested. Should the state censure public debate and social media and determine the 'right' religious teaching? While in some states and societies these measures appear to be acceptable, what about the central values of pluralistic societies and the rights given in liberal democracies? At the same time, the role of civil society organisations in providing complementary measures to those of the state were recognised. But the extent to which these organisations could provide alternative approaches and act independently from the state widely varied. A further recommendation to recognise societal conflict, but to provide platforms to creatively discuss the issue at hand without violence, too, finds a limit in different political systems and their values. Govern-

ments of authoritarian states dominated by one political party are unlikely to accept the recommendation to channel interests through diverse political parties to allow for a non-violent negotiation of issues.

The discussion of concrete means translating the findings into policies, thus, has shown the limitations to providing *generally applicable* policy recommendations. While the direction of what needs to be done appears to be shared and clear, the concrete measures are not. The acceptance of measures which might work well in one political and social context can challenge the social and political fundamentals of others.

To sum up, while the finding that the way towards violence involves all three levels (the micro, the meso and the macro level) is crucial for the formulation of recommendations for a meaningful response to violence and its prevention, it does not suffice for the translation into concrete policy recommendations. The way towards violence as well as its successful countering are multi-dimensional and despite shared characteristics of cases, no broad-spectrum antibiotic can be provided here. The debates among the workshop members on measures for diverse societies and political systems have shown that what might work in one country challenges the very fundamentals of the other. Even more, the transplanting of one into the other is doomed to fail – as many earlier examples suggest. This leads to the conclusion that the countering of non-state agents' violence is too complex for a *concrete* all-time solution.

*What, then, is the use, the value of this book?*

The treatment of non-state actors' way towards violence has shown the complexity of the problem at hand. A number of variables plays into the process, some of these variables are connected to one another, in one way or the other, and more often than not, the connections and links between them are not clearly transparent. Even more, the issue at hand is not static, but evolves constantly. And given the unclarity of what radicalism (or extremism) is, when and if violence is acceptable, when and if legitimate or condemnable, more often than not it is unclear what *concrete* end political agents aim at.<sup>5</sup> The prevention and overcoming of violence by non-state actors, thus, is a complex problem. Characteristic for such problems is that

---

5 What seems to be a simple answer might get challenged by the question of whether the attempted assassinations of Adolf Hitler, classifiable as both radical and extremist, were legitimate.

the start state or point of departure, the features of the intended goal state, and features of the barriers standing between them are unknown, prove complexity, change dynamically over time and linkages between them are partially intransparent (Funke 2012:683).

The solution, thus, requires decision makers capable of complex problem solving. Successful complex problem solving thereby has been found to share certain features, which remain equal in differing social or political contexts. These features relate to the following decision making process: 1) information gathering, 2) model building, 3) goal elaboration and balancing, and 4) agent's elaboration of plans and means (Funke 2010:136-137). Information gathering thereby refers to the collection of information about the systems in which the complex problem needs to be solved in and model-building implies the integration of "this information into [a] model of the system", i.e. the attempt to more systematically understand the environment (ibid.).

The issue with complex problems, next to their dynamic development, is that decision makers know too little about the relation between the different variables involved. Often, decision makers fail in solving problems as they are unable to systemise the immense available information into an appropriate model of the system. For the successful solution of complex problems information, thus, not only need to be gathered, but also systematised.

This book sought to provide insights into different cases and explanatory approaches of non-state actors' violence and to spark a new interdisciplinary debate in order to enable a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon. The task is not yet complete, but the first step into the direction is done. The book has provided information and furthered the multi-dimensional understanding of the issue. As such, the present information might allow for more profoundly building a model of the system, needed for successfully solving the complex problem at hand. This is the contribution of this book to approaching the issue of non-state actors' violence.

## *References*

- Echle, Christian. 2018. "Regierungskrise in Sri Lanka". *KAS Länderberichte*, 7 November 2018.
- Funke, Joachim. 2003. *Problemlösendes Denken*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Funke, Joachim. 2010. "Complex Problem Solving: A Case for Complex Cognition?". *Cognitive Processing*, 11: 133-42.



- Funke, Joachim. 2012. "Complex Problem Solving". In: Seel, N.M. ed. *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*. Boston: Springer. Doi: 10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6\_685.
- Goodhand, Jonathan. 2013. "Sri Lanka in 2012: Securing the State, Enforcing the 'Peace'". *Asian Survey* 53 (1): 64-72.
- Huntington, Samuel, P. 1993. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (3): 22-49.
- McDonald, Kevin. 2018. *Radicalization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- The Diplomat. 2019. "Easter Bombings Damaged Sri Lanka Economy Beyond Tourism". 31 July 2019. (<https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/easter-bombings-damaged-sri-lanka-economy-beyond-tourism/>). Accessed 21 February 2020.
- The Diplomat. 2019. "Easter Bombings Damaged Sri Lanka Economy Beyond Tourism". 31 July 2019. (<https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/easter-bombings-damaged-sri-lanka-economy-beyond-tourism/>). Accessed 21 February 2020.
- The Diplomat. 2019. "Muslims Politicians Resign Top Sri Lankan Government Posts Amid Terror Probe". 4 June 2019. (<https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/muslims-politicians-resign-top-sri-lankan-government-posts-amid-terror-probe/>). Accessed 21 February 2020.
- The Guardian. 2019. "Sri Lanka bombings: spy chief lambasted in damning report 24 October 2019". (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/24/sri-lanka-spy-chief-blamed-for-failures-over-easter-bombings>). Accessed 14 March 2020.
- This Week in Asia. 2019. "'Voice of The Nation': As Sri Lanka Loses Faith in the Government, It Looks to a Cardinal for Leadership". 12 May 2019. (<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3009577/voice-nation-sri-lanka-loses-faith-government-it-looks-cardinal>). Accessed 21 February 2020.
- Waha, La Toya. 2018. *Religion and State-Formation in Transitional Societies: Sri Lanka in a Comparative Perspective*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Wickramasinghe, Nira. 2014. *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age – A History*. New York: Oxford University Press.



## Index

- 4Chan 42–45, 49
- 8Chan 43, 44
- Abu Bakr al Baghdadi 104, 117, 127, 149
- Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) 83, 121, 132
- Aceh 124, 131, 132
- Afghanistan 7, 54, 102–105, 108, 109, 112, 119–121, 123, 129, 130, 135, 141, 155, 158–164, 172, 173
- Agency 24, 27, 28, 35, 36, 47, 60, 125, 159, 177, 181, 182, 188, 191–194, 212
- Al Qaeda 27, 83, 101, 102, 104–107, 110, 111, 118–121, 123, 125–136, 148, 155–158, 163, 164, 169
  - In Sinai Peninsula (AQSP) 106
  - In the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) 105
  - In the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) 106
- Algeria 103, 104, 106
- Anonymous 46
- Australia 129, 130, 136, 138
- Autocracies 75, 76, 86, 93
- Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (BNPT) 125
- Balliet, Stephan 107
- Baloch Liberation Army 144, 155, 167
- Balochistan Liberation Front 155
- Banalisation 56
- Bangladesh 83, 103, 105, 141, 148, 151
- Bin Laden
  - Osama 102
  - Son, Hamza 102, 114
- Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) 16, 20
- Breivik, Anders 107
- Brunei 93
- Cambodia 71, 91, 93
- Censur 214
- Central Asia 105, 148
- Charlie Hebdo Shooting 105
- China 105, 114, 135, 137, 168, 173, 209
- Christchurch 21, 43, 107, 113, 115
- Civil Society 55, 67, 69, 76, 159, 214
- Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) 141
- Complex Problem 207, 216, 217
- Complex Problem Solving 216
- Contention 16, 18, 27, 74, 101, 102, 110, 149, 213
- Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) 125
- Cyber Caliphate 39, 46
- Dar’ul Islam 119–121, 135
- Democracy 27, 47, 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, 60, 62, 65–69, 71–73, 75–79, 87–89, 92–94, 96, 97, 173
  - Definition 75
- Democratic Backsliding 76, 78, 80, 87, 95, 97, 98
- Deradicalisation 35
- Discrimination 21, 53, 62, 94, 210
- Distant Suffering 37, 38, 210
- Earnest, John Timothy 107
- East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), 105
- Education 20, 33, 143, 147, 174, 180, 186, 189, 190, 196, 214
- Egypt 103, 106, 121
- Emotion 24, 27, 193
- Escalation 21, 24, 34, 74, 80, 101, 104, 108, 110, 111, 117, 149, 155
- Europe 8, 9, 11, 15, 18, 22, 26, 27, 30, 33, 36, 42, 46, 51, 70, 112, 117, 118, 129, 133, 135, 193, 207

- Evangelicals 16  
Extreme Right Wing (XRW) 27, 107  
Foreign Fighter 117  
Foreign Terrorist Fighters 28, 103,  
117, 128–130  
France 68  
Funds 18, 20, 103, 111, 172, 177  
Gamification 40  
Gandhian Satyagraha 57  
Gang 18, 38, 144, 145  
Gang-Rape 145  
Gaza 37  
Germany 7, 19, 22, 33, 43, 44, 46, 49,  
86, 108, 113  
Governance 60, 62, 70, 96, 97  
Halle 22, 33, 43–46, 49, 107  
Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mu-  
jahideen 106  
Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) 102, 111  
Hezbollah 109, 113, 166  
Identity  
– Coalition 89  
– Collective 53  
– Cultural 53  
– Ethnic 61, 132  
– Islamic 145  
– Lines 213  
– Local 132  
– National 44, 90, 92, 93  
– Politics 208  
– Primordial 54  
– Religious 34, 146  
– Search for 24  
– Social 34  
– Tamil 61  
Ideological Cross-Over Support 213  
Ideology 7, 16, 65, 66, 68, 69, 72, 79,  
80, 102, 104, 142, 143, 145, 148,  
169, 181, 188, 189, 197, 199  
IED 123, 124  
Incel 35, 43, 45, 46  
India 15, 17, 27, 29, 39, 51, 54–58, 60,  
62–70, 103, 105, 141–144, 146,  
149–151, 169, 173, 211  
Indonesia 8, 27, 28, 47, 48, 71, 81, 83,  
87, 89, 94, 95, 97, 98, 112, 117,  
119–123, 125, 134–138, 178, 196,  
198, 202, 204  
Iran 101, 108–112, 114, 115, 156, 163,  
165, 166, 173, 175  
Iraq 83, 102–105, 108–110, 116–119,  
125–131, 133, 135, 136, 161, 179,  
185  
Islamic State (IS) 21, 83, 101, 117, 125,  
156, 161, 177, 178  
– Evolution of 126  
– ISIS 46, 49, 95, 97, 113, 114, 117,  
124–131, 134, 136–139, 148, 156,  
157, 161, 162, 166, 169, 179, 182,  
188, 196, 198–204  
– Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant  
(ISIL) 125  
Israel 68, 70, 86, 106, 109, 112  
Jaish-e-Muhammad 155, 157, 168  
Jamāt-u-Dawah 155  
Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin  
(JNIM) 106  
Jan Sangh 65  
Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) 16,  
141, 142, 151  
Japanese Red Army 33  
Jemaah Islamiyah 83, 120, 121, 130,  
132, 133, 136–138  
Jihad 28, 36, 46, 115, 119, 120, 122,  
130, 132, 135, 158, 168, 172, 178,  
181, 187, 189, 192, 199, 201, 202  
Jordan 126  
KEK 45  
Kenya 106, 137  
KOMPAK 122  
Laos 71, 93  
Lashkar-e-Jhangvi 155, 157, 161–164  
Laskar Jihad 89, 122  
Laskar Jundullah 122  
Laskar Mujahidin 122  
Liberalisation 71, 87, 92, 93  
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam  
(LTTE) 15, 143, 209

- Libya 103, 106  
 Loyalty 38, 64, 186  
 Ma Ba Tha 91, 93  
 Macro 73, 76, 212, 215  
 Malaysia 8, 28, 71, 83, 98, 117, 120,  
 121, 134, 135, 138, 177–185, 192,  
 195, 198–204  
 Mali 106, 113  
 Maoist 68, 141, 143, 148  
 Marxist 65, 142, 143, 148  
 Meso 73, 76, 212, 215  
 Micro 73, 76, 119, 212, 215  
 Middle East 83, 104, 105, 109–111,  
 115, 131, 134, 136, 164–166, 174,  
 175, 202  
 Migration 20, 34, 44, 47, 199  
 Mobilisation 24, 46, 54, 61, 66, 93, 94,  
 111  
 Modernisation 54, 71  
 Movement 17, 33, 34, 45, 51, 57–60,  
 64–67, 73, 74, 91, 104, 117–121,  
 124, 127, 131, 133, 135, 142, 147,  
 180, 193  
 Myanmar 16, 27, 71, 81, 83, 87, 91, 92,  
 94–96, 105  
 Narrative 35, 47, 107, 108, 136, 159,  
 167, 193, 198, 210, 213  
 Nationalism  
 – Bengali 54  
 – Buddhist-Sinhalese 17  
 – Burmese 94  
 – Hindu 66  
 – Indonesian 119  
 – Populist 78  
 Naxalites 64, 65, 142  
 Neo-Nazi 18, 42, 43  
 Nepal 54, 141, 143, 150, 151  
 Networks 7, 19, 76, 110, 120, 121, 123,  
 124, 134, 135, 148, 166, 172  
 Nigeria 103  
 Normalisation  
 – Radical Views 181  
 – Violence 212, 214  
 North America 18, 33, 36, 42, 47  
 North Caucasus 103  
 Norway 19  
 Pakistan 28, 51, 54, 103, 105, 109, 121,  
 141, 143–146, 148, 150, 155–169,  
 171–175, 211  
 Patriarchy 177, 178, 183, 188, 192, 197  
 Patriotic Association of Myanmar See  
 Ma Ba Tha  
 Political Party 16, 20, 57, 155, 171,  
 172, 196, 215  
 Radical Politics 51, 63  
 – Accomodation 68  
 – Methods 56  
 – Origin 52, 53  
 Radicalisation  
 – Cognitive, of Women 181  
 – Communitarian 37  
 – Communities 101  
 – Concept 24, 33, 34, 36, 72, 74, 118,  
 177  
 – Definition 24, 25, 34, 73, 74, 180  
 – Experiences 46  
 – Far-Right 42  
 – Individual 80, 118  
 – Into Terrorism 78  
 – Into Violence 25, 74  
 – Into Violent Extremism (RVE) 25  
 – Islamic 179  
 – Islamist 83  
 – Jihadist 36  
 – Multi-Dimensionality 214  
 – Muslim, in Sri Lanka 20  
 – Political 72, 78  
 – Reciprocal 108, 110  
 – Religious 110, 141, 146, 180  
 – Self 118  
 – Within Violence 25  
 – Without Violence 25, 74  
 Radicalism 24, 25, 54, 55, 68, 72, 74,  
 90, 94, 215  
 – Transactional Radicalism 55  
 Radio Dakwah Islamiyah Surakar-  
 ta 120  
 Rational Choice Theory 23, 24  
 Rationality 63  
 Red Army Faction (RAF) 7, 33, 49

- Red Brigades 33
- Relative Deprivation Theory 23, 24
- Rohingya 83, 93, 94, 96
- Saba Qaiser 144
- Saudi Arabia 20, 103–105, 109, 158, 184
- Shia 37, 101, 102, 109, 126, 146, 156, 162–166, 175
- Sindhu-Desh Liberation Army 155
- Singapore 8, 9, 11, 12, 26, 51, 71, 93, 112, 117, 123, 136, 178, 198, 200, 203, 204
- Sipah-e-Muhammad 155
- Social Cohesion 7, 110, 214
- Social Media 36–38, 40, 44, 107, 186, 190, 192, 194, 208, 214
- Telegram 106
  - Twitter 39, 41, 109, 115, 116
- Social Medial
- Facebook 107, 113, 179, 196, 208
- Somalia 102, 104, 106, 113, 130
- South Asia 15, 18, 22, 28, 29, 70, 83, 84, 103, 104, 115, 141, 142, 144, 145, 148–150, 159
- Southeast Asia 15, 22, 27, 29, 48, 71, 72, 77, 80, 82–84, 86, 87, 91, 93, 95–98, 105, 117, 118, 120, 121, 125, 130, 131, 133–138, 177, 184, 199–204
- Special Detachment 88 124, 125
- Sri Lanka 7, 8, 12, 15–21, 28–30, 47, 48, 51, 54, 70, 103, 104, 113, 141–143, 149–151, 207, 209, 210, 212, 216, 217
- Sufi 19, 20, 28, 158, 162
- Suicide
- Attack 18, 21, 124, 134, 164, 168
  - Belt 42
  - Black Tigress 18
  - Bombing 19, 42, 127, 134, 135, 168, 178
  - Self-Immolation 19, 22
- Sunni 20, 101, 109, 126–128, 137, 146, 162, 184, 192
- Switzerland 19
- Syria 33, 35–39, 41, 42, 46, 83, 102–105, 109–111, 114, 115, 117–119, 125–131, 134–136, 161, 165, 175, 179, 185, 194, 199
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) 102, 103
- Tarrant, Brenton 107
- Tatmadaw 92
- Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan 156, 157, 172
- Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) 148, 156
- Thailand 27, 71, 81, 83, 87, 90–92, 94–98, 124, 131, 132
- Thauweed Jamath 20
- National Thauweed Jamath (NTJ) 21
  - Sri Lanka Thauweed Jamath (SLTJ) 20
- the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) 121
- The Philippines 27, 71, 81, 83, 87, 91, 92, 94, 95, 117, 120, 123, 131, 132, 134, 135, 185
- Timor Leste 93
- Transformation 20, 37, 40, 58, 59, 79, 104, 117, 119, 120, 142, 143, 171, 172, 174, 188
- Trust 8, 66, 91, 131, 208–210
- Truth 37–41, 47
- Turkey 103, 111, 114, 115, 117, 126, 129, 135
- Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) 105
- Uighurs 105
- Umma 186, 189, 194
- Ummah See Umma
- United Kingdom 34, 36, 43, 86, 112, 198, 201
- United States 21, 30, 33, 34, 39, 46, 53, 86, 101, 108, 109, 112, 114, 115, 168, 171
- Vietnam 71, 93

Violence

- Against Women 46, 144
- Collective 56
- Definition 22
- Images 37
- Imaginary 37, 43
- In Initiation Rituals 38
- Instrumental 212
- Normalisation 212

- Performative 39, 40, 212
- Threat 38
- Waves 102

Vishwa Hindu Parishad 149

Weather Underground 33

Wilayat 103

Yemen 102–105, 113, 114

Zainabyoon 155, 156, 165, 166

