

HOW A PRO-ISIS CELL EMERGED IN PAPUA

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I. INTRODUCTION

Between late May and early June 2021, more than a dozen suspected ISIS supporters were arrested in Merauke. They were suspected of planning a bombing in this easternmost city of Indonesia, on the southern coast of Papua.

The May-June arrests were not the first evidence of pro-ISIS cells in Papua but they were a more serious extension of ISIS influence into Papua than anything that had taken place earlier. In May 2018, two men were arrested in Timika, accused of planning an attack on police, but they never succeeded in recruiting anyone else. In 2019, fugitives from Lampung were arrested in North Sulawesi and Papua, but they had fled there to avoid capture, not to develop a new cell.

Those arrested in Merauke in 2021 were different because they sought to build a community. The number of pro-ISIS suspects was the largest to date for a Papua cluster. A few were disseminators of ISIS propaganda, with one man in direct communication with ISIS Syria. They were tasked with translating ISIS releases into Indonesian and editing ISIS videos for distribution on social media. The Merauke cell also focused on fund-raising to collect contributions for families of detained terrorists as well as for Indonesian fighters in Syria.

One of the most striking aspects of the group is that several were former Salafi scholars. As a group, “pure” Salafis, many of them trained in Saudi-influenced schools, have been considered relatively immune to violent extremism. Most Salafis see the extremists’ elevation of jihad to a pillar of Islam, equivalent to prayer or fasting, as a deviation from the duty to deepen one’s individual faith.¹ There have been a few notable crossovers, the most famous being radical cleric Aman Abdurrahman who began his teaching career as a Salafi scholar. It is still a relatively rare phenomenon, however, so the career path of the Merauke leaders is particularly interesting to trace.

The discovery of this cell that provided refuge to some extremists linked to the 28 March 2021 Makassar bombing, underscores how important it is, legally and conceptually, to keep pro-ISIS and pro-independence groups separate. In April 2021, following the assassination of the provincial intelligence head for Papua by pro-independence guerrillas, the government of President Jokowi decided to brand all independence fighters and activists as “terrorists.” But violent Islamist ideology linked to ISIS and ethno-nationalism linked to an independence movement are very different organisations. Responding to them also requires distinct counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency strategies.

This report examines how the Merauke cell developed and what measures might help local communities strengthen defences against such groups.

II. BACKGROUND TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN PAPUA

The emergence of a pro-ISIS cell in Merauke was preceded by several other incidents that indicated Papua was increasingly seen as a place of refuge or recruitment by different Islamist groups on the exclusivist end of the ideological spectrum.

Papua is overwhelmingly Christian but there are important populations of Muslims, both indigenous and non-Papuan, the latter mostly migrants from Java and Sulawesi.² While population statistics are notoriously unreliable in Papua, comparative figures give an idea of

1 International Crisis Group, “Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don’t Mix”, Asia Report No. 83, 13 September 2004.

2 For background, see International Crisis Group, “Communal Tensions in Papua,” Asia Report No.154, 16 June 2008.

where these concentrations lie.³ According to figures released in mid-2021 by the Papuan office of the Central Board of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik, BPS), Muslims constituted roughly 13.3 per cent of the provincial population but were close to 46 per cent in Merauke, and slightly less than that in the capital city of Jayapura. Just as Christians in Papua cover the ideological spectrum from mainstream Protestant and Catholics to a variety of evangelical and Charismatic sects, many different streams of Islam are represented there. They include the broad social organisations like Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah and the Sulawesi-based al-Khairat as well as the more conservative but non-violent Islamist groups like Hidayatullah, Jamaah Tabligh (known elsewhere in the world as Tabligh-e-Jamaat), Hizbut Tahrir (banned in 2017); and various Salafi factions.⁴ Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that a pro-ISIS group would emerge, even if any hint of violence was emphatically rejected by Muslim organisations in Papua.

The first indication that ISIS might have support in Papua, was the discovery of a highly unrealistic plot concocted by a Sundanese from Timika, Cecep Suparman. Cecep was born in South Sumatra but had grown up in Timika, where his parents were part of the official resettlement program known as transmigration.⁵ After graduating from a state junior high school, he worked first as a driver, then as a guard, and finally as a park keeper for the Freeport copper mine. He was radicalised online in 2017 and became increasingly extreme through communication with a pro-ISIS prisoner in Java. He tried to recruit people in Timika but failed. He also invited his pro-ISIS social media chat group friends to come to Timika and make it the new Poso, in the sense of making it a training area and jihad centre. Almost no one was enthusiastic about the idea, which was good news for Papua. The only one interested in joining was Choirul, a Kalimantan resident, but he would only join if Cecep funded his travel. Everyone else contacted was reluctant to go to Papua because it was known to be a hotbed of conflict and unrest.⁶ Cecep and Choirul discussed attacking police and military in Mimika as well as members of the Damal and Amungme ethnic group because they were Christian and because in the past, they had killed Muslim migrants.⁷ Before they could do anything, the pair was arrested on 5 May 2018.

3 IPAC, “Numbers Matter: The 2020 Census and Conflict in Papua”, Report No.60, 29 October 2019.

4 Hidayatullah is a conservative but mainstream organization is based in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan and has a network of schools designed to produce 150 preachers (*da'i*) per year to send around the country. It was founded by Ust. Abdullah Said (1945-98), an ethnic Bugis from Sulawesi. Its main school in Papua is in Sorong, West Papua, but it also has satellite schools in Fak-fak, Kaimana, Timika, Nabire, Wamena, Jayapura, Serui, Biak, Manokwari and Merauke. In the past, these schools sometimes gave refuge to suspected terrorists fleeing justice, believing that all Muslims were obliged to help others in trouble. For background on Jamaah Tabligh, a Muslim missionary organization, in Papua, which consists almost entirely of non-Papuan migrants, see IPAC, “Religious ‘Super-spreaders’ in Indonesia: Managing the Risk of Stigmatisation,” COVID-19 Briefing No.4, 19 May 2020. For background on Hizbut Tahrir in Papua, see International Crisis Group “Communal Tensions in Papua”, 16 June 2008. The most controversial Salafi faction was that headed by Ja’far Umar Thalib, who went to Papua to build a pesantren in Kerom after violence in Tolikara in 2015. He faced strong opposition not only from local residents but also from the Papuan Muslim Council (Majelis Muslim Papua). See “Mantan Ketua Majelis Muslim Desak Jafar Diusir dari Papua”, republika.co.id, 4 March 2019. Ja’far was arrested in February 2019 on the criminal charge of assault together with six of his santri for vandalizing the house of one of the pesantren’s neighbours. He was sentenced to five months in prison in July 2019 and died of natural causes the following month.

5 This was a highly controversial Soeharto-era program (that has been continued on a much smaller scale thereafter), designed to ease overcrowding on Java, which never succeeded; open “unoccupied” land for development that was in fact communally owned and provided valuable income for indigenous peoples; and in some areas like Papua, served as a security buffer to ensure that the independence movement would not gain ground.

6 Direktori Putusan Mahkamah Agung Republik Indonesia, Verdict in the case of Cecep Suparman alias Abu Bilal alias Abu Taubah bin Rukadi, Decision No.1040/ PID.SUS/2018/ PN.Jkt.Tim, 12 December 2018.

7 Ibid.

Choirul received a two-and-a-half-year sentence and was released in June 2020; Cecep received four years and was released on 17 August 2021 after pledging allegiance to the Indonesian state.

The second-pro-ISIS group to arrive in Papua consisted of twelve men from JAD-Lampung, who arrived in June 2018 after their leader, Ujang Saepurohman, was arrested on 3 June.⁸ Ujang's arrest was one of many that took place in the aftermath of an uprising on 9 May 2018 by pro-ISIS prisoners at a Brimob detention centre on the outskirts of Jakarta. The group that went to Papua had all been Ujang's followers at a weekly religious study session (*pengajian*) he held at his school, Pesantren Tahfiz Qu'ran al-Firdaus, in Karanganyar, South Lampung.⁹

A teacher at the school, Rudi, who was also head of the JAD sub-branch in Bandar Lampung, knew there was a great danger that all of his affiliates could be rounded up by the police once Ujang was interrogated. He suggested to a few others that they should leave for Papua because it was the furthest away that they could flee and the police would have difficulty tracking them down.¹⁰ They sent one of their members ahead to Jayapura to look for a house to rent and then followed in small groups until all twelve had arrived. Once there, they reconstituted their *pengajian*, began selling fried chicken in the neighbourhood, and practiced shooting with air guns at coins and bottle tops hung from the walls. They had no interaction with Papuans except the occasional neighbour and did not appear to have tried to recruit anyone. Their sole mission, at least initially, was to ride out the storm and avoid arrest.

But soon, differences broke out among the group. In February 2019, one member, Ustadz Sholihin, left for Bekasi to learn bomb-making from a JAD member with the idea of bringing back his new skills to Papua to teach others. Several did not want to learn, fearing the consequences.¹¹ In April 2019, two others from the group left for Timika, feeling they were being watched. The only reason for going to Timika was to be out of Jayapura; they only wanted to escape surveillance. They stayed seven days, then after making a down payment on a house and buying a motorcycle, not insignificant outlays, they decided to leave for Poso to join MIT, and went back to Jayapura to get a ship to Sulawesi. Both were arrested in Bitung, North Sulawesi, and all other remaining members of the group were arrested in Jayapura.

The cases of Cecep and JAD-Lampung suggested that Papua was on the map for extremists, but both examples were anomalous. Cecep and Choirul were unaffiliated to any larger organisation and had little capacity to mount a terrorist operation. Most of the JAD-Lampung group just wanted to hide and did not want to increase the risk they already faced by learning and deploying bomb-making skills. The threat posed by the Merauke group was more serious.

8 Ujang, a native of Brebes, Central Java, was formally appointed as amir of the Lampung branch in 2014 by the overall JAD amir, Hari Budiman alias Abu Musa. Hari, a close associate of Aman Abdurrahman, was later killed in Syria. Ujang was reluctant to accept because he felt he did not have the religious knowledge required but he was not allowed to refuse. He also represented Lampung at the formal establishment of JAD at a meeting in late November 2015 in Batu, Malang.

9 The twelve members in Papua were Aldrensyah alias Hasan from Riau whose son attended Ujang's school; Ust. Rudy Hananto and Ust. Sholihin; teachers at the school; Musa S; Muhammad Rafii alias Ucok; Yousep alias Yusuf; Mahfud; Busdro; Ali; Yanto Rahmat Akbar and Karwanto alias Kancil.

10 Direktori Putusan Mahkamah Agung Republik Indonesia, Verdict in case of Muhammad Rafii alias Ary Hernandes alias Ucok bin Syafii, Decision No.927/Pid.Sus/2020/PN.Jkt.Tim, 19 August 2020.

11 Direktori Putusan Mahkamah Agung Republik Indonesia, Verdict in case of Karwanto alias Kancil alias Ridwan bin Kabul, Decision No.942/Pid.Sus/2020/PN Jkt.Tim, 19 August 2020.

III. SIGIT PRAMONO ALIAS JOHN TUKIJO

Sigit Pramono alias John Tukijo is the most important figure behind the spread of ISIS teachings in Merauke. Born in Kediri, East Java, he attended a well-known Salafi school in Cilacap, Mahad Ali Imam Syafi'i. Upon graduation in 2010, he was assigned to work as a teacher in the Hidayatullah boarding school (*pesantren*) in Merauke.¹² He also held regular religious study sessions (*pengajian*) at various mosques, including al-Hikmah Mosque in the Bambu Pemali area of the city. This area has such a predominant migrant population that residents are often called “Jamer” – an acronym for “Javanese in Merauke”.

Al-Hikmah was originally a Muhammadiyah mosque, but it later became known as a centre of Salafi activities. Several Salafi study groups met there, drawing in not just Javanese but Bugis, Makassarese and others, many from outside the area.

Sigit was deeply respected in Salafi circles because of his strong religious credentials and his mastery of Arabic.¹³ In 2011, he married a woman of Javanese descent who was also a former Hidayatullah student. He continued to live and preach at the school for the next two years.

In 2013 he received an offer to work with a Salafi publisher in Surabaya, Pustaka Elba, that published many Salafi texts translated from Arabic into Indonesian. Sigit, eager to plunge into the publishing world, accepted the job and moved to Surabaya. This was just as the Syrian conflict was attracting attention in Indonesia, and after the declaration of the caliphate in June 2014. Sigit began studying ISIS texts in depth, including the book *Murqoror Fit Tauhid* or Tauhid Curriculum, a key Salafi jihadi text translated from the Arabic by Aman Abdurrahman. By 2015, he had broken with his colleagues at Pustaka Elba and decided to swear allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi.

Sigit eventually opened a social media account in the name of John Tukijo, posting many translations of ISIS texts originally written in Arabic. Sometime in 2015, he got a message from Ustadz Ganna Pryadharizal, known to pro-ISIS Telegram chatters as Abu Jaisy. Ganna, a journalist, was from the Jakarta suburb of Bekasi and a graduate of al-Azhar in Egypt. He became attracted to ISIS and decided to join the new Islamic State, arriving in Syria in 2015. He asked Sigit if he would be willing to help translate ISIS releases from Arabic into Indonesian, and Sigit readily agreed. Ganna then arranged for Sigit to join the Telegram group run by al-Amaq, the ISIS news agency. Most members were active contributors from the Middle East. One of Sigit's translations was an appeal from ISIS spokesman Abul Hasan Al Muhajir published in April 2018 in Issue No.4 of *Rumiyah*, the English language online magazine, entitled “You Will Remember What I Have Told You”. (It appeared in Indonesian as “Maka Kelak Kalian akan Mengingat Apa yang Aku Katakan Kepada Kalian”.) It was an exhortation to ISIS supporters not to lose hope, not to get discouraged but to keep waging war on the enemy and focus on the eventual Islamic victory, not on the troubles of the present.¹⁴

12 Sigit's assignment to the Hidayatullah school was at the recommendation of Ustadz Rudi, who was junior to Sigit in Cilacap. Rudi was a Merauke native of Javanese descent. As a youth, he had been active in the Merauke branch of Muhammadiyah, the modernist Muslim social organization. After he graduated from Imam Syafi'i, he began disseminating Salafi teachings, together with Sigit. The two fell out after Sigit became an ISIS supporter. Rudi became an anti-ISIS activist and led the move to expel Sigit from the al-Hikmah mosque where ISIS supporters met.

13 Sigit was a graduate of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Arabic (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab, LIPIA) in Jakarta. LIPIA is a branch of Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

14 For the full text see “Maka Kelak Kalian akan Mengingat Apa yang Aku Katakan Kepada Kalian”, portalislam2018.wordpress.com, 26 April 2018.

In addition to disseminating ISIS media, John Tukijo's account was well-known among ISIS supporters as the go-to defence against anti-ISIS narratives. For example, when the issue arose that ISIS was an American creation because it never attacked Israel, he said:

ISIS is only the age of an ear of corn and how many forces does it have? How many planes does it have? It should be the 'Islamic' countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Indonesia attacking Israel! We have the Indonesian military, Sukhois, F16s, hundreds of thousands of soldiers, so do the Saudis and the Gulf countries – why aren't they attacking Israel? But you don't blame them. Instead ISIS, which was just born yesterday and is still busy fighting enemies, is the one you fault. We have to be fair.¹⁵

His postings about ISIS being the true caliphate were persuasive to many in Indonesia. One person he influenced was Dita Siska, a young woman from Temanggung, Central Java, who had plotted to stab a policeman at the time of the uprising at the Brimob detention centre in May 2018. She said she knew about Islamic State from John Tukijo:

In 2016, I learned for the first time about the Islamic caliphate from a posting on Facebook by John Tukijo. It included a link, I forget the name, that explained the truth of the Islamic Caliphate, the primacy of jihad, the importance of the land of greater Syria, the supporters of idolatrous tyrants [anshorul thoghut] and the importance of emigrating [to Syria].¹⁶

Few knew the true identity of John Tukijo. Even fewer knew that the man who was posting these influential ISIS messages from 2015 to 2017 was operating from Merauke, Papua.

IV. ANSHORUL DAULAH MERAUKE

Sigit Pramono returned to Merauke in 2015 at the invitation of his former students, who had heard he was no longer working for Elba Publishing. He saw his return as a chance to spread ISIS teachings.

A. Recruiting the Salafis

He began teaching again at al-Hikmah and other Salafi mosques. He knew that if he was too direct in his pro-ISIS approach, he could alienate some in his audience, so he was careful to gradually introduce ISIS elements into what seemed to be straightforward Salafi teachings. He did this by focusing on the writings of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab that were also important references for ISIS.¹⁷ His students were enthusiastic and invited him to address more select gatherings. It was at these that he began to introduce concepts such as the idolatry of democracy; the ten ways Muslims by their own actions can be expelled from Islam; how to distinguish friends from foes and so on. He showed how Salafis had deviated from the correct path. For example, he said they professed their faith to Allah but by considering the Indonesian government to be Muslim, even when it clearly rejected the sole right of Allah to determine law, they were effectively worshiping *thoghut*. Then he showed how the Islamic State was the only state that could guarantee the purity of *tauhid* (oneness of God) that Abdul Wahab had envisioned.

¹⁵ Posting of John Tukijo on UKKchannel, Telegram, 29 Juni 2016.

¹⁶ Direktori Putusan Mahkamah Agung Republik Indonesia, Verdict in the case of Dita Siska Millenia, Decision No. 1163/Pid.Sus.Teroris/2018/PN.Jkt.Utr, 9 February 2019.

¹⁷ Some of the texts he relied on were *Utshul Tsalasah* (Tiga Landasan Utama); *Kitab Tauhid*, and *Nawaqidul Islam* (Pembatal Keislaman).

Sigit was cautious with this dakwah strategy because anti-ISIS sentiment ran high in the Salafi community in Merauke. In February 2015, for example, Nurul Huda Mosque hosted a lecture entitled “The Danger of ISIS for Religion and the State”. Little by little, however, Sigit was able to draw in new recruits until he had about two dozen in his group.

B. Military Training and Fund-Raising

In the beginning, Sigit focused on getting his students ready for *hijrah*, or joining ISIS in Syria, and several got passports. But by 2015, it was already becoming difficult to cross into Syria without getting caught. By the end of 2015, some 150 Indonesians had been arrested in Turkey and deported. Aman Abdurrahman, as the senior ISIS figure in Indonesia, responded to this situation by issuing a fatwa that the priority for ISIS supporters (*anshorul daulah*) should still be to emigrate, but if this proved impossible, then the next priority should be to wage war in one’s own country. If this too proved impossible, supporters should at the very least donate their worldly goods to others who could emigrate or fight.¹⁸ Aman’s fatwa was reinforced by the exhortation from the late ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, which said if the door to *hijrah* was closed, then supporters should open the door to jihad at home.

These exhortations gave Sigit and his friends new enthusiasm for attacks. Their discussions focused increasingly on martyrdom, suicide attacks and similar topics. He distributed Bahrum Naim’s online tutorials about bomb-making.¹⁹ Members also began to undertake physical training such as distance running, swimming in the sea, martial arts, and sharp-shooting (in this case, targeting birds with air guns). Several of Sigit’s students in Papua wanted to volunteer as suicide bombers. One was Arif Murtopo who offered to detonate himself at the Merauke police headquarters. Sahrullah, another member, wanted to blow himself up at a church in Bambu Pemali. They tried to follow Bahrum Naim’s instructions, but all their attempts at bomb-making failed.

In 2016, Sigit also began raising funds through social media to help the families of prisoners and fighters in Syria. These funds also contributed to the house in Cilacap, Central Java where families wishing to visit their relatives detained in maximum security prisons on the island of Nusakambangan could stay. Arif Murtopo became the treasurer. The Merauke group also used the funds to buy a computer to help edit videos, as requested by Ustadz Ganna in Syria. With the help of Sahrullah, they edited at least ten ISIS videos. Ganna was also responsible for distributing the funds raised in Merauke for Indonesian ISIS fighters in Syria, amounting to Rp.3.5 million [about US\$245] by 2017.

For almost two years, the managers of al-Hikmah mosque had no inkling of Sigit’s activities. Only in 2017 did they become aware of what was going on, as many of Sigit’s followers declared the other Salafis to be *kafir* (infidel). As a result, the group was expelled from the mosque.

C. Hijrah to Balikpapan and Makassar

The conflict between Anshorul Daulah Merauke and the Salafi community at al-Hikmah Mosque ended the freedom that Sigit and his followers had hitherto enjoyed. They moved around among other mosques such as al-Furqon and at-Tauhid, but they got few new recruits, since the Salafis were just as active in countering them with an anti-ISIS narrative. They also began to worry that the police had detected their presence.

18 Direktori Putusan Mahkamah Agung Republik Indonesia, Verdict in the trial of Oman Rochman alias Aman Abdurrahman, Decision No. 140/Pid.Sus/2018/PN JKT.SE, 22 June 2018.

19 Bahrum Naim was an ISIS leader from Solo, Central Java who arrived with his wife in Syria in January 2015. He tried to incite numerous attacks, none of them successful, but his online manuals about using weapons and making bombs were widely circulated. He was killed in 2018.

For these reasons, Sigit moved to Balikpapan, East Kalimantan at the end of 2017. He had received an offer to manage a Qur'anic memorisation school there from a wealthy woman who admired his internet postings. Roro Widawati was the wife of a businessman and a former lecturer at Balikpapan Polytechnic. She was known to be an enthusiastic follower of ISIS and gave generously to support families of those arrested. She also had formed a pro-ISIS group in Balikpapan of about 30 individuals and planned to make the Qur'an school there a place to educate their children.

Even after he moved to Balikpapan, Sigit continued his study sessions online with the Merauke group until the middle of 2018. Between his duties at the school and managing an ISIS online media outlet called "Satu Mata" [One Eye], he got too busy to keep the Papua program going.²⁰ He urged his followers there to move to Makassar, because of the large pro-ISIS group based at ar-Ridho Mosque in Sudiang, a Makassar subdivision. The group had grown under the leadership of Ustadz Basri, one of Makassar's best-known radical clerics, who was already in prison when Sigit was urging the move.²¹ Basri was succeeded by Ustadz Bustar, a LIPIA graduate and teacher at the ar-Ridho pesantren. Most of Sigit's students in Merauke were ethnic Bugis, originally from Makassar, who still had family there and as a result felt more secure. Seven of the Merauke members made the move, among them Arif Murtopo, Suherman and Sahrullah.

V. THE ARRIVAL OF ANDI PRIBADI

The departure of Sigit and the others drained the energy from the remaining Merauke members. There were no longer any study sessions. Sigit had been the driver of all ISIS activities and now he and the most active members were gone.

Developments on the counter-terrorism front had also made the remaining Merauke members worried about their own safety. Cecep and Choirul's arrest in May 2018 increased the Merauke group's anxiety, even though they had no links to the pair.

Then the government enacted a strengthened anti-terrorism law, Law No.5/2018, which widened the scope of terrorism offences and for the first time made possible "preventive strikes", even when no violence had occurred. The South Jakarta District Court in June had also declared Jamaah Anshorul Daulah (JAD) and any other pro-ISIS groups to be banned entities. These policies were put in place in part because Indonesia was hosting many high-profile events, beginning with the Asian Games and a major World Bank-IMF summit in Bali. With the new law fast-tracked for implementation, police arrested 396 people in 2018 alone, many of them connected with pro-ISIS groups, including those linked to the uprising in the Brimob detention centre or the Surabaya bombings. Arrests continued into 2019 as national elections approached.

Sigit's followers grew even more worried after the arrest in May 2019 of Sholihin from JAD Lampung and his friends who had fled to Papua. They were increasingly concerned that they would be next and stopped most activities, only seeing each other at Friday prayers. But their concern intensified with the arrival in Merauke in 2019 of Andi Pribadi, from Probolinggo, East Java,

²⁰ Sigit's partner in managing Satu Mata was Wahyu Subekti, who was the former editor of Manjanik, another online ISIS publication. Wahyu had tried to join ISIS but had been deported from Turkey before he could do so.

²¹ Ar-Ridho Mosque in Sudiang is part of the complex of Pesantren ar-Ridho, the school that Basri founded and that became the centre of ISIS activities in Makassar. Basri, leader of an important Darul Islam faction, was a veteran of training along the Afghan-Pakistan border in the early 1990s. He was an early supporter of ISIS, swearing the bai'at in late 2013 or early 2014. His son, Saefullah Taddampu, was later killed in March 2015 fighting with ISIS. Basri himself was arrested in April 2015, accused of involvement in an attack on then South Sulawesi governor Syahrul Yasin Limpo in 2012. He was sentenced to eight years in prison but died in custody in 2018 of natural causes (though prison healthcare in Indonesia is notoriously inadequate).

aged 25, who had come to marry a woman he had met online. Andi, it turned out, had been arrested earlier in Malaysia for ISIS activities and maintained contact through a social media chat with some of his former cellmates.

Andi came to the attention of the Malaysian police while working as a migrant labourer. He was arrested in 2018 for postings urging attacks on Buddhists as a response to violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar. After his release and deportation in 2019, he returned to Probolinggo, East Java where through his online explorations, he met a self-radicalised divorcee from Merauke named Irma Kurniati alias Ummu Hafsa. Irma, an ex-Salafi, had only become an ISIS supporter in 2018 and had never been part of Sigit's group. She nevertheless became very committed to the ISIS cause and decided to divorce her then-husband because he refused to become a member.

After Andi married Irma in 2019, he worked at various jobs in Merauke, selling shoes in the Merauke's New Market, working as a construction coolie, and delivering pizza. He also had long discussions with his wife on how to expand ISIS in Merauke. In 2020, they started a WhatsApp group for online study sessions to propagate ISIS teachings. The participants were women from several different cities including Merauke who were members of Irma's social media network. He also gradually got to know several members of Sigit's group, Anshorul Daulah Merauke, through a friend of Irma's. When Andi and Irma moved house in June 2020, their new home proved to be near the at-Tauhid Mosque where the remnants of the group, about a dozen men, often prayed. In October 2020, they and Andi decided to form an in-person ISIS study group, first at the mosque and then in members' homes. With Andi taking the lead, they began discussing possible targets for attack, and Andi shared files he had downloaded on his phone about how to make bombs, since no in the group had ever made one.²²

Andi also told them of his vision to build a settlement (*tamkin*) in Merauke that could serve as a refuge from the disasters that would befall the earth at the end of time, which he thought was imminent. The Dajjal, or Islamic equivalent of the Anti-Christ, would come to cities but according to Andi, not to remote areas. Andi and friends would find empty land and plant date palms that would survive an apocalyptic drought and the hinterland of Merauke would become an alternative to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina as an area safe from the Dajjal.²³

Even as he talked of the utopia in Merauke, Andi was planning to return to Java. He was not content with planning an attack in Merauke, because he believed it would have little impact. His goal was a high-profile suicide bombing at Brimob headquarters outside Jakarta, the same place where the prison uprising had occurred in 2018.

VI. RETURN TO MAKASSAR

Meanwhile, police conducted a major raid on ISIS followers in Makassar on 6 January 2021, leading to two deaths and eighteen arrests. Dozens more arrests followed. Some of Sigit's followers who had moved to Makassar, among them Arif Murtopo, Suherman and Sahrullah, decided it was too risky to stay any longer and in February, they returned to Merauke – but not for long. They advised the others in the Merauke group to abandon ISIS because it was too dangerous. Arif himself joined Jamaah Tabligh, the conservative non-violent Muslim missionary movement, although it was not clear whether this was a cover or stemmed from a genuine realisation that ISIS was misguided.

²² Confidential documents made available to IPAC by government official who requested anonymity, Jakarta, May 2021.

²³ Ibid.

A few weeks after their return to Merauke, on 28 March 2021, a friend of theirs, Lukman al-Farizi, and his wife blew themselves up in front of Makassar cathedral. Arif Murtopo and his friends were terrified, because they had been part of the same religious study group with Lukman, and it emerged that Lukman's friends had been planning other suicide attacks. A new wave of arrests followed, until by May, more than 50 men and women had been taken into custody. This figure later swelled to 99 arrested in connection with events in Makassar.

Arif Murtopo, Suherman and Sahrullah flew to Makassar anyway, not to carry out revenge attacks but to surrender to the police. They hoped that by surrendering, they could get themselves lighter sentences. Detachment 88 used their information to arrest thirteen other members of Anshor Daulah Merauke, including Andi Pribadi and Irma, on 28-29 May 2021.²⁴ This was another preemptive strike. Police were concerned that a high-profile national sports event, the KONI games, was planned for Papua in October 2021, and they wanted to make sure that no terrorists were around to disrupt it. The police did not stop in Merauke. On 28 May 2021, they went to Balikpapan in East Kalimantan and arrested Sigit Pramono.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several findings emerge from an examination of the ISIS cell in Merauke.

1. While there remains strong resistance in the Salafi community to violent Salafi jihadism as represented by ISIS, crossover can occur if there is a leader with strong religious credentials, such as Sigit Pramono, who can make a persuasive case to draw in a significant number of followers. There is no inexorable progression from Salafism to violence, as some have tried to suggest, but ISIS did succeed in attracting more Indonesian Salafis than any earlier movement had done. In Sigit's case, the use of writings and reinterpretations of Mohammed Abdul Wahab were important. It would be useful to gather together some of these cases to identify tactics used on the Salafi population so as to help in preparing a counterstrategy.
2. Papua is clearly on the radar screen of different extremist groups as an area for recruitment, training and refuge. The numbers are tiny but the fact that they have been based in migrant communities will not help efforts to promote co-existence between migrants and indigenous Papuans. The latter already feel that they are under siege from the steady influx of non-Papuans from elsewhere in Indonesia. Relations have been strained since riots in August and September 2019, in which both communities suffered losses. When the COVID pandemic struck Papua, some Papuans saw it as a migrant disease, introduced into Papua by migrants attending superspreader events elsewhere. The police need to be doubly vigilant now to ensure that extremist cells are immediately detected before they can do any harm.
3. The internet and social media have played a major role in facilitating extremist religious study sessions, enabling fugitives from Java and Lampung to communicate with their friends at home and encourage them to come to Papua. These ties facilitated the Makassar-Merauke links and Bekasi-Lampung-Papua ties. Heavier penalties for communication

²⁴ Those arrested in Merauke included Abdul Kadir, born 1970, a Bugis from Kalosi, South Sulawesi; Deden Supendi, born 1981, a Sundanese from Sukabumi, West Java; Sabar, born 1968, a Bugis from Enrekang, South Sulawesi; Sunaryandoyo alias Sunaryo, born 1981, a Javanese from Merauke; Uswah Abdan Taqwa, born 2000, a Bugis from Pare-Pare, South Sulawesi; Wasry, born 1984, from Makassar, South Sulawesi; Yoyok Puji Mulyono, born 1986, a Javanese from Riau; and Zainal Ramadhan, born 1983, a Bugis from Makassar, South Sulawesi.

with fugitive extremists may be one answer, but only with clear criteria that restrict such penalties to evidence of planning or advocating violence. Even with increased vigilance, such communication will be hard to prevent.

4. Other reports (such as International Crisis Group's 2012 report "How Indonesian Extremists Regroup") have noted how the presence of fugitives helps shift the locus of extremist activity and can create new groups in the place of refuge. The Merauke group provides strong evidence of this, as extremists moved between Papua and Sulawesi, and others moved between Lampung, Papua, North Sulawesi and Bekasi. The reassuring news is that Detachment 88 has been able to follow most of these cases, enabling it to foil several plots. The challenge for this unit and other parts of the criminal justice system is to ensure that they do not inadvertently strengthen motivation for retaliation but rather use the arrests to better understand and counter the extremist community in Papua. Those convicted of terrorism in Papua should be drawn into the police deradicalisation program.

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