

Through the Militant Lens: The Power of Ideology and Narratives

Prof. Dr. Rohan Gunaratna
& Ms. Orla Hennessy

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Abstract

In March 2012, Prof. Dr. Rohan Gunaratna interviewed Umar Patek and Ali Imron, both of whom have admitted involvement in the two bomb attacks in Bali in October 2002 which killed over 200 people. This ICCT Research Paper explores violent extremist “narratives” within the Indonesian context by interviewing a convicted terrorist (Ali Imron) and one currently undergoing trial (Umar Patek). It is hoped that by understanding and de-constructing those emotional stories or ideologies that are often told and used to justify violence, or to motivate someone to commit violence, in pursuit of a cause; that the policy making community can then counter these narratives more effectively. This Paper first explores the background of violent extremist narratives and then recounts and analyzes the Patek and Imron interviews. Based on these interviews and current knowledge of violent extremist narratives, the paper concludes with a series of recommendations.

About the Author

Prof. Dr. Rohan Gunaratna is Head of International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) and a Professor of Security Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Elected to the advisory board of NTU (2009-2011), Gunaratna is also a Member of the Steering Committee of George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute and a Senior Advisor to CSIS Washington DC's Projects on Arc of Instability and Al Qaeda and Associated Movements. A Senior Fellow Alumnus at the United States Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point, he serves as a litigation consultant to the U.S. Department of Justice. He is author and editor of 15 books including "Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror" (Columbia University Press), an international bestseller, lead author of Jane's Counter Terrorism, a handbook for counter terrorism practitioners, and with Michael Chandler, former Chairman of the UN Monitoring Group into the Mobility, Weapons and Finance, "Countering Terrorism: Can We Meet the Threat of Global Violence?" He also serves on the international advisory committee of Journal for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, as well as on the board of advisors of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague.

Ms. Orla Hennessy, MA is Programme Assistant of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague. In this capacity, she is responsible for supporting the Research Fellows and other staff members through assistance with editing and research and maintaining and further developing ICCT's website content and other outreach tools. She studied History, Art History and Politics at University College Dublin and received her Masters in Conflict, Security and Development from King's College London with distinction. Previously, she has worked for the Irish Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and various NGOs including Health Connections International and the Global Reporting Initiative. She is the author of the ICCT Commentary "Containing al Qaeda in Africa".

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Contact

ICCT – The Hague
Koningin Julianaplein 10
P.O. Box 13228
2501 EE, The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)70 800 9531

E info@icct.nl

“My friends went to fight in the jihad because of these stories. This is what inspired international terrorism.....If they want to kill, there are verses in the Quran.”

Ali Imron, Afghan veteran and
Bali bomber serving life imprisonment¹

“When they kill Muslims, surely my heart is sad as to why they do it. I like to make self defence to protect them. We have to explain to the enemies of NATO, US or Israel to go out of Muslim country. Without fighting, they better leave, otherwise by force, we will kick them out.”

Umar Patek, accused of making explosives in
Bali bombing, currently on trial in Jakarta²

1. Introduction

On 12 October 2002, the terrorist group al Jamaah al Islamiyyah (JI) planted bombs in Paddy's Bar and the Sari Club in the Bali resort of Kuta.³ The blasts killed 202 people from 21 countries, including 88 Australians, 38 Indonesians and 28 Britons. The attack was funded by al Qaeda and originally planned to coincide with the anniversary of 9/11. It was the worst terrorist attack ever to take place in Southeast Asia.

One of the principal questions in terrorism studies is “what are the factors that motivate individuals to participate, advocate, and support political violence?” This ICCT Research Paper takes this question as its starting point. The above quotes by Ali Imron and Umar Patek, both involved in the Bali bombing and self-described Mujahids/Jihadists, provide some insight into the working of violent extremist's minds. For this Paper, both Patek and Imron were interviewed while in prison in Jakarta,⁴ in order to gain a greater understanding of just what motivates violent extremists. Both are members of JI, a group which campaigns to install an Islamic Caliphate across Indonesia and South East Asia through the use of violence. The interviews are particularly pertinent as Patek is currently on trial in Jakarta for his role in the Bali bombing in 2002 and the bombing of two churches in Jakarta in 2000.

The aim of this Paper is to explore extremist's motivations and it hopes to add to the already growing literature on violent extremist narratives. ‘Narrative’ here refers to those emotional stories or ideologies that are often told and used to justify violence, or to motivate someone to commit violence, in pursuit of a cause. This Paper explores Imron and Patek's personal narratives, particularly in relation to the established JI and al Qaeda narratives.

The Paper is divided into three sections. Firstly it will explore the meaning of “narratives” and provide explanatory descriptions of the term. It will then look at the types of narratives used broadly by jihadists and then specifically, by both al Qaeda and JI. Following a brief section outlining the background to the Bali bombings, the bulk of the paper is made up of the interviews of Patek and Imron and analysis. The third and final section details

¹ Interview, Ali Imron, Police HQ, Jakarta, March 22, 2012

² Interview, Umar Patek, Police HQ, Jakarta, March 21, 2012

³ The authors are grateful to Peter B.M. Knoope, Eelco J.A.M. Kessels and Salim bin Mohamed Nasir for their invaluable comments on the paper.

⁴ The interviews were conducted by Prof. Rohan Gunaratna and Jolene Jerard, Associate Research Fellow, ICPVTR, Singapore in Jakarta Prison. Both detainees consented to be interviewed. For further information and requests regarding the interviews, please contact ICPVTR www.pvtr.org.

the Paper's conclusions and sets out several recommendations.

By interviewing extremists and understanding their motivations and rationale it is hoped that strategies or frameworks could be drawn up to help prevent others from turning to terrorism. Above all, terrorists most often see their actions as rational and the first step to help preventing others from travelling down this path is recognising that fact. If the policy making community learns to understand extremist's motivations, it is feasible to believe that these motivations and incentives can then be more adequately countered.

1.1 Understanding narratives

Throughout the last decade the literature on countering violent extremism has grown substantially in tandem with a growing governmental focus on preventing terrorism post 9/11.⁵ The most common, obvious, conclusion amongst the literature is that there is no single reason why a person will sympathize, support and eventually join and participate in militant groups. Most commonly the reasons are subjective and individual to the actor but often there will be overarching stories or narratives common to members of a particular group. Kundnani provides a succinct description of narratives:

“Narratives have plots, within which events are given significance and explained in terms of particular causes. They also have protagonists who are given particular identities. Events and protagonists are relational, in that they only make sense in relation to other actual and potential protagonists and other actual and potential events. And narratives are necessarily selective, reflecting choices about what is relevant and irrelevant, and foregrounding particular events and protagonists as opposed to others. Usually, narrative plots involve their protagonists being confronted with a disturbance or conflict which needs to be resolved through some course of action.”⁶

For extremists this course of action will most certainly be through the use of violence. There may also, of course, be multiple narratives at play: that of the militant group, a national narrative or also narratives within the person's social community.

It should be acknowledged however, that different audiences accept different narratives, and that violent narratives do not necessarily directly lead to violent action. For instance, there be many who agree with the narrative but will not engage in violence. This Paper focuses specifically on the Jihadi narrative. With this in mind it should also be noted that this Paper relates to those whose “action”, as stated above, is violence. It does not refer to those who agree with the narrative but are inert, nor sympathisers nor radicals; the focus is specifically on active violent extremists or terrorists.⁷

1.2 The Jihadi narrative

With this in mind, it has been argued that there are four distinct, although not mutually exclusive, narratives that motivate (specifically Jihadi) terrorists.

- i) The *political* narrative concerns themes like the crimes of the West and its supported proxies, the global suppression of certain (religious) minorities and the inequitable distribution of income, welfare or land. Violent extremists succeed in telling a very persuasive, politically subjective story, often without aspiring to be part of the political solution themselves;

⁵ See for instance, Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, March 2011). Available online at <http://dspace.dsto.defence.gov.au/dspace/bitstream/1947/10150/1/DSTO-TR-2522%20PR.pdf>, accessed March 2012.

⁶ Arun Kundnani, “Countering the Counter-Jihad: Security Narratives and the New Far Right”, forthcoming ICCT Research Paper, June 2012.

⁷ For more information, see Leuprecht et al., ‘Narratives and Counter-Narratives for Global Jihad: Opinion versus Action’, in E.J.A.M. Kessels (Ed.), *Countering Violent Extremist Narratives* (The Hague: National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2010), pp. 58-69. p. 65.

- ii) The *moral* narrative argues that concepts such as liberal democracy, the freedom of speech and gender equality are unachievable, hypocritical Western ideals. They emphasise that these so-called liberties have only resulted in the moral degradation of Western societies;
- iii) *Religious* narratives are often employed to further delegitimise the West and advance the perception that fighting against the immoral West is a just cause. Jihadi terrorists often succeed in utilising a persuasive theological argument that sanctions the use of violence against enemies of Islam; an argument they claim to be valid globally and to be an individual duty upon every Muslim;
- iv) The *social, heroic* narrative exploits feelings of social exclusion and presents jihadism and the struggle against the West as an adventure, filled with heroism, glamour and admiration, by emphasising romantic notions of brotherhood of arms and exciting life in camps.⁸

Education and monetary factors, which, although are not strictly part of a narrative, are also relevant here. In some cases the person's level of education will be a factor because if it is low, their level of analytical reasoning may not be fully developed and they will be more accepting of stories, narratives and ideologies without question. However, this is not always the case as opinion polls in the West Bank and Gaza in 2001 demonstrated that the more educated Palestinians are, the more they support armed attacks against civilians in Israel.⁹ Another incentive is also monetary. Economic motivations can still be key drivers for some when turning to terror. In many cases, young people will be recruited through the promise of a stable income and will then be taught the political and moral narratives at a later stage once their loyalty is secured.¹⁰

This list is not considered to be exhaustive but merely a general framework establishing some key motivational narratives and incentives. Above all it is recognised that a person's decision to join a terrorist organisation will always be subjective and based on their own personal experiences. This paper also acknowledges that, in some cases, there may be no clear ideology motivating individual violent extremist actions at all.

1.3 Al Qaeda's "single narrative"

While the above is a general overview of motivational narratives, Alex Schmid analysed al Qaeda's specific ideology. Referencing al Qaeda's charter Schmid argues that there are three basic tenets:

- i) Firstly there is a basic grievance - a Zionist-Christian alliance is held responsible for most, if not all, that is wrong in Muslim countries and the way Muslims are allegedly discriminated and/or (mis-)treated in the world;
- ii) there is a vision of the good society: a single political entity - the Caliphate - that replaces corrupt Muslim rulers under Western influence with the rule of Sharia (Islamic Law) wherever there are Muslims; and
- iii) there is a path from the grievance to the vision: the eradication, in a violent jihad led by a heroic vanguard (al-Qaeda), of the alleged malign Western influence from the Muslim world.¹¹

Schmid also includes some specific elements including: Jihad as an individual obligation for all Muslims, the legitimisation of suicide as a tactic of asymmetric warfare (despite the fact that Islam forbids this); and the return of the Caliphate, or the stepping stone to a Sharia based world government.¹²

Again, it is recognised that the above list is not exhaustive. This is particularly true in light of the recent

⁸ E.J.A.M Kessels, "Introduction", in E.J.A.M. Kessels (Ed.), *Countering Violent Extremist Narratives* (The Hague: National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2010), p. 7.

⁹ T.R. Gurr, "Economic Factors", in L. Richardson (Ed.), *The Roots of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 88.

¹⁰ Gurr, "Economic Factors", pp. 85-101.

¹¹ Alex P. Schmid, "The Importance of Al-Qaeda's Single Narrative", in E.J.A.M. Kessels (Ed.), *Countering Violent Extremist Narratives* (The Hague: National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2010), pp. 46-56.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

publication of some of Osama bin Laden's correspondence which demonstrated that the al Qaeda network is vast and "unruly" and bin Laden's hold on it was most likely in decline.¹³ As such, the narrative may vary from branch to branch or region to region or even from leader to leader. However in, general, many in or affiliated with al Qaeda will subscribe to (in some degree) some, if not all, of the statements outlined above.

1.4 The background of al Jamaah al Islamiyyah

In terms of understanding Patek's and Imron's individual motivations it is also important to understand the JI and Indonesian context. Al Jamaah al Islamiyyah means "The Islamic Group" in Arabic. The group was loosely formed by Abu Bakar Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar in Indonesia throughout the seventies and eighties.¹⁴ It has its roots in Darul Islam, a radical movement that called for the establishment of Islamic law in Indonesia.¹⁵ Bashir and Sungkar were imprisoned for nine years in the eighties for political disobedience and it has been argued that their period of incarceration was the tipping point towards their adoption of radical Islam.¹⁶ This growing militancy was in parallel with the rise of other Islamic groups like the Muslim Brotherhood or the Palestinian Liberation Organisation throughout this period. In 1984/5 they also raised groups of volunteers to fight in Afghanistan. Originally they assumed this would be good Jihad training for recruits once they returned to Indonesia, however returning recruits in fact influenced Bashir and Sungkar to think in global terms – rather than just the regional context.¹⁷ Since then, the network has grown to include cells across the region, including in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

As for their own narratives, Bashir and Sungkar kept up to date with the Global Salafi Jihad movement through their associates in Afghanistan. By the mid to late nineties, neither were now talking about merely establishing a Muslim state in Indonesia, but a *khilafah* (world Islamic state). Ramakrishna argues that by 1999 the JI ideology, as espoused by Bashir and Sungkar, had hardened and Islamic writers such as Abdullah Azzam (a key mentor of Osama bin Laden) and Mohammed al Faraj (executed in Egypt in 1982 for his role in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat) featured prominently on JI reading lists.¹⁸

Faraj is the more extreme of the two writers and argues that the Quran and the Hadith are primarily about warfare and that the concept of Jihad should be taken literally. He also argued that even Muslims who deviated from Sharia are also legitimate targets for Jihad. Although bin Laden subscribed to these ideas, Abdullah Azzam did not and advanced the more traditional argument of Jihad as the eviction of infidels from "lost" Muslim lands.¹⁹

2. Interviewing Umar Patek and Ali Imron

The interviews with both Patek and Imron took place at Police Headquarters in Jakarta. Patek was interviewed over the course of two days on 21 and 22 March 2012 while Imron was interviewed on 22 March 2012. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesian and later translated to English. Where there may be discrepancies or uncertainties from Bahasa to English, these are included in the footnotes. In all other cases, they are direct quotations from Patek and Imron.

¹³ BBC News, Osama Bin Laden documents released, 3 May 2012. Available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-17941778>, accessed 3 May 2012.

¹⁴ Bashir and Sungkar however, "officially" founded the group while in exile in Malaysia in 1993.

¹⁵ Kumar Ramakrishna, "Constructing the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist: A Preliminary Inquiry", RSIS Working Papers no. 71, (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2004), p. 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁹ Azzam cited in Malise Ruthven, *A Fury for God: The Islamic Attack on America* (London and New York: Granta, 2002), p. 203.

Umar Patek was born in 1966 in Pemalang, Central Java. In the early nineties he joined JI and trained in militant camps in Afghanistan before returning in the mid-1990s to Indonesia.²⁰ As a member of JI he was known as “the demolition man” as he specialised in assembling explosives. After the Bali attack he fled to the Philippines where he joined the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) before moving to Pakistan to fight, or, in his own words, “wage Jihad” against foreign forces in Afghanistan. On 25 January 2011, Patek was captured in Abbottabad, Pakistan, the same city where Osama bin Laden was hiding, although Patek has denied ever meeting him. He was extradited to Indonesia on 11 August 2011. Currently, he is on trial in Indonesia for his role in the Bali bombings and for his role in the bombing of nine churches in Jakarta in 2000, which killed at least 19 people. Among his charges are premeditated murder, bomb-making and illegal firearms possession.

Ali Imron was found guilty on 18 September 2003 of planning the Bali attacks and is currently serving life in prison in Indonesia. He is the younger brother of Huda bin Abdul Haq (also known as “Mukhlas”) and Ali Amrozi bin Haji Nurhasyim, both of whom were convicted and executed for their roles in the bombing. Imron is currently a witness in the Patek trial.

Throughout both interviews it was evident that each of the men subscribed to the general JI and al Qaeda ideologies. However each emphasised different aspects and it was overwhelmingly evident that both had different perspectives of “the cause”.

2.1 The Political Narrative

Both, of course, referenced political grievances in varying degrees. Referring to non-Muslims Patek said,

“They kill Muslims in Palestine and in other places. About Palestine, I knew from the newspapers and radio when I was in Sada camp in Pakistan. I heard about Pattani in 1991. I met Pattani people in Sada. They came for training. They told me about the massacre of Muslims in Pattani by the Thai military. I felt sad when I heard. I did not say anything. About Bosnia and Chechnya, I knew from the radio when I stayed in Torkham camp in Afghanistan. They did not teach in the class [at Sada]. I knew from news that Philippine military was killing Moros. When I was fighting against the Philippine military, I saw with my own eyes! Then I knew the actual suffering. JI did not send me to the Philippines, I volunteered and went. When they kill Muslims, surely my heart is sad as to why they do it. I like to perform self defence to protect them. We have to explain to the enemies of NATO, US or Israel to go out of Muslim country. They better leave, without fighting. Otherwise, we will kick them out by force.”

Patek spoke at length on this theme and within the overall context of the interview it appeared that political grievances i.e. his perception of the West’s global persecution of Muslims (in keeping with al Qaeda’s narrative), particularly drove him to toward radicalisation. Furthermore, while Patek was moved by those stories he heard from afar, actually seeing violence in reality committed him further. Imron, on the other hand rejected this outright saying “I am not motivated by Muslim massacres”.

Both also displayed disillusionment with the political process. For Patek, the only realistic solution to stop Muslim persecution is using force against the enemy, referring to this several times as “self-defence”. Imron is also disillusioned with political and democratic processes but, interestingly, he blames this more so on the decline of Islam itself. He said “The Islamic Empire inspired the Muslims to fight for lost glory. In the past, Islam in Europe was strong. Now it is going down. Stories gave us impact to continue the fight”. He added, “It is about the strength of Islam from 600 AD to 1924 AD, my friends went to fight in the jihad because of these stories.”

²⁰ Abuza, Zachary, “Umar Patek: Indonesia’s Most Wanted”, The Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 1, No. 4., 2010. Available online at [http://www.apgml.org/frameworks/docs/7/Abuza%202010 April Umar%20Patek Indonesia%E2%80%99s%20Most%20Wanted%20.pdf](http://www.apgml.org/frameworks/docs/7/Abuza%202010%20April%20Umar%20Patek%20Indonesia%E2%80%99s%20Most%20Wanted%20.pdf), accessed 10 March 2012.

2.2 The Religious narrative

In terms of religion, both men differed in their knowledge of theology and the extent to which it motivated them. Perhaps because he has greater religious knowledge of the Quran and because he was less motivated by political grievances, Imron greatly emphasised religious duty. Quoting from Verse 60 of surah Al-Anfal in the Quran, Imron argued that this was the key verse and also one of his key motivational texts.²¹ He claimed “My ideology is the laws of Islam”. Patek also referenced the Quran but far less clearly and admitted “My theology is Surah al Tawbah... I forget the verse. I did not memorize.”²² He explained that his limited knowledge of religion was due to his poor education. But when referring to other group members, he used their level of religious knowledge to rank them saying “Mukhlas, Ali Imron and Imam Samudra had a high level of theology, but Maulana was the same level or lower, and Heri Kuncoro is even lower [than me].”

So although religion is important for Patek it is not his key narrative. Nevertheless, he does selectively call upon it, using such verses as the Surah al Tawbah, to justify violence. It is also evident that one’s level of religious knowledge is important within the group itself and those with higher levels of knowledge garner greater respect. For Imron it seems that the restoration of a strong Islam throughout Europe and the world is chief among his priorities. He believes this should be done by force but, at the same time, it should strictly adhere to the rules laid out in the Quran and the Sunnah. For Imron the laws of Islam not only justify his use of violence but implore him to use it.

Interestingly, although both men clearly place a high value on theology both conceded that burning the Quran does not motivate them to fight, with Imron saying “We can print more Quran, when they burn al Quran we do not have to burn the people”. Considering Imron’s emphasis on the religious narrative and his interpretation of his religious duty, this statement seems to be somewhat contradictory – something that was the case regularly throughout the interviews.

Both also differed greatly when questioned on the meaning of Jihad. Umar Patek said “jihad is implementing Islamic law seriously, sternly and consistently in a place by a nation of people using force.”²³ He added: “If Muslims can implement Islamic law in a country without fighting, that is also jihad. In the Philippines and Afghanistan, I practise jihad musallah [armed jihad] or jihad by force by guns and other weapons.” For Patek his personal identity is important and he clearly identifies himself as a Mujahid rather than a Jihadi. It is very possible that for Patek, “Jihad subscribes to a corrupt understanding of jihad and a Mujahid performs correct jihad”.²⁴ Ali Imron however was much more succinct. Perhaps referencing the author Faraj here, he said, “The meaning of Jihad is war”, although he also admitted there was no single interpretation of the Quran. He later added, “Jihad is the responsibility to live up to Islam.”

2.3 The social, heroic narrative

Although both men are committed Jihadists, both have said that they regret their participation in the Bali attacks, and claim they never agreed with them in the first place. While both have been quite persistent with these statements, it should be borne in mind that (at the time of writing) Patek was undergoing trial and Imron hoping for a reduction in his 20 year sentence. At the same time however, these statements provide an interesting insight in the social dynamic of JI. Patek said “I did not agree with the Bali bombing. I told Imam Samudra: “Let us

²¹ Spoils of War, the 8th chapter of the Quran: “And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom Allah knows. And whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged.” (The Quran, 8:60)

See also: “And fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted to God alone. And if they desist-behold, God sees all that they do.” (The Quran, 8:39)

²² “And so, when the sacred months are over, slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God wherever you may come upon them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place! Yet if they repent, and take to prayer, and render the purifying dues, let them go their way: for, behold, God is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace.” (The Quran 9:5)

²³ In place of sternly, Patek used the term hardily, a direct translation from Bahasa to English.

²⁴ Interview, Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan, March 28, 2012.

not do attacks in Bali or Jakarta.”²⁵ And Imron, equally, was of the same mindset saying, “I believed it was JI activity. But I never wanted to, as it is not proper jihad. I was junior to Mukhlas. I went along with it. As it was a JI program, I followed as I was a member of JI. Although in my belief, it was wrong, I went ahead.” In this case, both argue that they were just following orders. The fact that they claim that they did not agree with the act, nor think it was correct Jihad, did not matter. If true, it would seem that the obligation to the group superseded their own opinions. In this case it was a sense of duty to follow orders but also the need to conform and kowtow to social pressure.

Patek raised the issue of heroism, or the expected “glamour” of joining a terrorist group, in a surprising way. Originally he had not told his wife that he was a Mujahid and she only found out on his arrest in Abbottabad in 2011. Patek assumed that on hearing this she would be impressed or love him more but was surprised to find that neither were the case. Patek also spoke of the conflict between his role as a husband and his role as a Mujahid. His wife converted from Catholicism to Islam but as Patek said “She embraced Islam... but she did not understand the purpose of Islam. She said ‘do not go to other countries to do jihad. Just stay with your brother, uncle and with me’”. He continued, “I love her, so I have to do everything and anything for her. As a husband, I have an obligation to my wife. I think sometimes, ‘Is jihad more important?’.”

It is interesting to compare the social pressure of the group to that of Patek’s family. It would seem he was not willing to “let the group down” by refusing to play a role in the Bali attack but when his wife asked him to stay with the family and give up Jihadism, he was torn. In this instance there are multiple narratives at play and Patek was divided.

2.4 Disengagement

When asked about his treatment in prison, Patek was full of praise for the system. He admitted that although he had not been expecting it, he was treated well and had formed a close bond with his ISI Colonel Zakariya whilst imprisoned in Pakistan. Patek said: “He is close to me. I saw him like a grandfather. He became very interested in me. He had a very good behaviour. He feels what I feel. I said to him, ‘I want [you] to meet my wife’.” While in prison, Imron has recanted some of his former beliefs but his views remain radical. He would like to reform JI to its original intent and position himself as its leader. He said if he gets out of prison he will continue to teach others about JI saying, “If I get out of prison, I will come to Singapore and Australia. I want to spread ideas and educate people.”

3. Conclusions

This Paper sought to explore the motivating stories and narratives for those who commit acts of extremist violence in order to bolster knowledge of the phenomenon and to be better able to counter such motivations.

When interviewed, both men expressed different reasons and motivations for joining with and fighting for JI. They also both placed emphasis on different aspects of the JI ideology and both had clearly different priorities. As mentioned earlier, it is evident that both subscribe to the al Qaeda and JI narratives in varying degrees. Many of their statements were in line with known al Qaeda and JI doctrines, however neither could clearly elucidate their opinions. Both would jump backwards and forwards citing political grievances or religious scripture and often contradicted themselves.

The contradictory nature of their speeches seemed to dilute their motivations and it would appear that they have a superficial understanding of their own narratives and motivations. For instance, if you were to ask either man outright whether he agreed with the statements outlined in section one above, he would agree.

²⁵ Imam Samudra was the mastermind of the Bali bombing and an operational leader of JI. In Nov. 2008 he was executed in Indonesia for his role in the Bali bombing.

However, if you were to press him further to elaborate or explain why, the answer would be a lot more opaque. During the interview for instance, Patek admitted: “I know what ideology is. I do not know how to explain it.”

Overwhelmingly, it is acknowledged that there is no single, “one size fits all” reason for turning to terrorism and so the differences between both men’s opinions are hardly unexpected, but it is still surprising that neither detainee had a succinct, clear idea or message.

In terms of individual differences, although both spoke of political grievances, Patek’s view seemed less highly developed than Imron’s as he spoke of particular scenes he had witnessed, whether in the field or on the TV or Internet. Witnessing the actual persecution of Muslim communities galvanised him and this is arguably one of his key motivational narratives. His understanding and knowledge of theology was limited and so while religion plays a role in his decision making it appears he uses it selectively to justify his cause. The Islamic writer Abdullah Azzam’s influence can also be seen when Patek speaks of reclaiming “lost” Muslim lands and ejecting infidels. It seems likely that Patek subscribes to Azzam’s more traditional form of Jihad, and this was perhaps also demonstrated by his reluctance to take part in the Bali bombing.

In contrast to Patek, Imron prioritised the restoration of Islam to the glory days of the middle ages. Religious duty and knowledge of the Quran are extremely important to him and judging from his statements he subscribes to the more radical vision of Islam as in the writings of Faraj. If attempting to de-radicalise Imron, or challenge his ideas, a crucial component would be to employ a respected qualified Islamic cleric with great knowledge of the Quran who could help dispel Imron’s perceived myths.

The fact that neither man mentioned economic incentives is also interesting. Over the course of the interview neither mentioned salaries or payments or any kind of financial incentives while operating with JI. This would indicate that political/religious and moral motivations were far greater priorities for both men as opposed to financial incentives.

It was also interesting to see the human/mundane side of Patek – when he discussed his wife – and note the potential implications that this may have for policy. While Imron did not have these circumstances, the importance of family is clearly evident and one that could be utilised when attempting to implement de-radicalisation or counter-narrative programmes.

Ultimately, the interviews above tend to underscore current research on violent extremist narratives. While both men adhere to the broader group narratives of JI and al Qaeda they both have personal priorities and differences based on their own experiences. This should not take away from the importance of the interviews as they represent the latest thinking of men who are currently incarcerated and one who is currently undergoing trial. It is interesting to note how both men’s opinions on the Bali attacks themselves have changed since their incarceration and they have perhaps become clearer and more vocal in their opposition to the attacks. In terms of attempts to counter their narratives, both men seem to have disengaged from violence. Their views however remain radical – not mainstream. Attempts at de-radicalisation seemed particularly positive with regards to Patek who spoke affectionately of his Commander. That Patek has been treated fairly and humanely has made a big impression on him and has helped the disengagement process. However countering a persons ingrained narratives is not an easy task, and the individual’s personal motivations should be a key tool when informing any attempts to counter violent extremist narratives.

3.1 Recommendations

1. Overwhelmingly it is acknowledged there are no single motivations for individual terrorists and therefore employing counter-narratives would most likely work better on an individual basis.²⁶
2. Working with highly educated respected religious scholars would help to dispel myths and explain scripture quotes out of context. A qualified religious cleric would be able to successfully counter false religious narratives with knowledge.
3. The importance of family members should be considered and utilised where possible.
4. Fair treatment for detainees and upholding their human rights while in prison is crucial and can greatly help the disengagement process. The police and judicial systems are the face of the state and in acting fairly and demonstrating compassion, can help dispel negative myths associated with the state.
5. The persecution of Muslims by Western countries and unilateral bodies should be limited – hearing these stories or witnessing them first hand can be the difference between a radical and someone who turns to violence.

²⁶ This is re-iterated elsewhere when employing de-radicalisation and re-habilitation programmes, where there is consensus that there is no “one size fits all”, and that attempts to de-radicalise should often be tailor-made. See for instance ICCT – The Hague (2011), Executive Summary The Hague Rehab Conference December 2011, available online at <http://www.icct.nl/userfiles/file/Executive%20Summary%20The%20Hague%20Rehab%20Conference%20December%202011.pdf>. Accessed 1 May, 2012. See also Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Ellie B. Hearne, *Beyond Terrorism: De-radicalization and Disengagement from Violent Extremism*. International Peace Institute, October 2008. Available online at: <http://www.ipinst.org/publication/all-publications/detail/24-beyond-terrorism-deradicalization-and-disengagement-from-violent-extremism.html> accessed 1, May 2012.

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