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The Disengagement of Jihadis in Poso, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

To what extent are jihadists in Indonesia disengaging from violence? Based on original fieldwork in Jakarta and Central Sulawesi, including interviews with 23 current and former Poso-based jihadists, we examine the emotional, psychological, rational, and relational factors that can lead militants to turn away from terror tactics.

KEYWORDS: disengagement, Poso, Indonesia, Jemaah Islamiyah, terrorism, Poso conflict

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES WHY INDIVIDUAL JIHADIS from Tanah Runtuh and Mujahidin Kayamanya,¹ two of the major jihadist groups that participated in communal violence and terror actions in Poso, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, are disengaging from violence and the extent to which government programs may have played a role in their shifts.² Drawing upon interviews with 23 jihadis

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1. The three major jihadist groups are Tanah Runtuh (literally, "collapsed land"), a group named after a neighborhood in Poso and an arm of the Islamist extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah (literally, Islamic Congregation, JI); Mujahidin Kayamanya (Holy Warriors of Kayamanya), which folded into Tanah Runtuh in 2005; and, most recently, Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid (Community of the Helpers of Divine Oneness, JAT). Most violent acts in Poso today are connected with JAT members. Some of these are former Tanah Runtuh and Kayamanya members who migrated to JAT.

2. Poso is a municipality in Central Sulawesi Province stretching from the coast to the mountains. Muslims comprise 76% of the population and live mostly along the coast, while 20% of the population are Protestants, living mostly in the highlands and, prior to the conflict, in the town of Poso, which is now Muslim-dominated. Poso was the hub of communal conflict in the region, which broke out in the aftermath of the fall of Suharto's 32-year New Order dictatorship. The fighting,

Asian Survey, Vol. 53, Number 4, pp. 754–777. ISSN 0004-4687, electronic ISSN 1533-838X. © 2013 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/AS.2013.53.4.754.

from Poso as well as the Javanese militants who trained them, local police, government, and non-governmental organization (NGO) officials, we can ascertain that many Poso jihadis are indeed disengaging. This article seeks to convey the complexity of disengagement as a process that is often rational, psychological, emotional, and relational. We highlight five drivers of disengagement: (1) the development of new relationships with individuals outside the jihadi circle; (2) pressure from parents and spouses; (3) cost-benefit analysis; (4) disillusionment with the tactics and leaders of the movement; and (5) changing personal and professional priorities. Government programs, ad hoc and inconsistent as they are, play only a minor role in these shifts.

Disengagement is a decision by individual members of a terror group, radical movement, or gang to cease participation in acts of violence. Thus, the term specifically focuses on behavior, in contrast to the often-used term *deradicalization*, which denotes the delegitimation of the ideological principles that underpin that behavior.³ It is often the case that an individual may disengage without ever fully deradicalizing.

Disengagement should be understood as a gradual process of internal reflection, occurring over months or years, especially in those instances where one eventually leaves the movement. This process often involves reading, discussing, debating within oneself and among friends, and making dozens of small incremental choices. John Horgan distinguishes two types of disengagement: psychological and physical disengagement.⁴ Horgan notes that an individual physically disengages either by migrating from a violent to a non-violent role within the group, or leaving it altogether. According to Horgan, an individual may disengage psychologically from violence due to feelings of disillusionment over tactics, strategy, or ideology; an inability to reconcile the disconnect between the fantasy and reality of being involved in a terrorist group; burnout; or changing priorities.⁵ Tore Bjørge highlights several other

which began initially as bouts of gang violence, escalated into riots, clashes, massacre, and civil war. The conflict became framed in religious terms as mosques, churches, and an Islamic boarding school became targets of the fighters and especially after members of JI and other Islamist extremist groups began arriving to aid the Muslim side by providing religious indoctrination, paramilitary training, and weapons.

3. Omar Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists* (London: Routledge, 2009).

4. John Horgan, "Individual Disengagement: A Psychological Analysis," in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. by Tore Bjørge and John Horgan (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 21.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

factors including family, the desire for employment, and the sense that “things are going too far.”⁶ Renee Garfinkel augments this list, noting the role that building interpersonal relationships can play in engendering disengagement from violence.⁷

Disengagement can also be conditional, in cases where individual militants assert that they would recommit to violence should certain circumstances arise. However, we would be mistaken to cite conditionality as a factor that inherently diminishes the legitimacy of disengagement. Often, militants set the conditions under which they would re-engage so high that the prospects of future participation are exceedingly slim.

Much of the literature on deradicalization and disengagement in the Muslim world comprises evaluative studies, which assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Saudi, Yemeni, Singaporean, Malaysian, or Indonesian government programs.⁸ Other scholars examine why a specific radical Islamist movement chose to abandon violence.⁹ However, comparatively few have sought to assess the reasons why or the extent to which individual jihadis have disengaged from violence.¹⁰ A majority of the studies on Indonesia mirror this trend, evaluating programs rather than focusing on the experiences of individuals.¹¹

6. Tore Bjørgo, “The Process of Disengagement from Violent Groups of the Extreme Right,” in Bjørgo and Horgan, eds., *Leaving Terrorism Behind*, pp. 36–40.

7. Renee Garfinkel, “Personal Transformations: Moving from Violence to Peace,” United States Institute of Peace, Special Report, no. 186 (April 2007), p. 1.

8. Zachary Abuza, “The Rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah Detainees in Southeast Asia: A Preliminary Assessment,” in Bjørgo and Horgan, eds., *Leaving Terrorism Behind*, pp. 193–211; Christopher Boucek, “Extremist Reeducation and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia,” *ibid.*, pp. 212–23; Christopher Boucek, Shazadi Beg, and John Horgan, “Opening up the Jihadi Debate: Yemen’s Committee for Dialogue,” *ibid.*, pp. 181–92; International Crisis Group, “Deradicalization and Indonesian Prisons,” *Asia Report* 124 (November 19, 2007); Kristen Schulze, “Indonesia’s Approach to Jihadist Deradicalization,” *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 1:8 (2008), West Point, pp. 8–10.

9. Omar Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*; Diaa Rashwan, “The Renunciation of Violence by Egyptian Jihadi Organizations,” in Bjørgo and Horgan, eds., *Leaving Terrorism Behind*, pp. 112–32.

10. Muhammad Najib Azca, “After Jihad in Indonesia: Movements, Emotions, Narratives, and Trajectories of (Post) Jihadists,” unpublished doctoral thesis, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, Leiden, Netherlands, 2011.

11. Abuza, “The Rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah Detainees”; Schulze, “Indonesia’s Approach to Jihadist Deradicalization”; M. Tito Karnavian, “The ‘Soft Approach’ Strategy in Coping with Islamist Terrorism in Indonesia,” paper presented at the National Symposium “Memutus Mata Rantai Radikalisme dan Terorisme” [To cut the chains of radicalism and terrorism], Jakarta, July 27–28, 2010; Mark Woodward, Ali Amin, and Inayah Rohmaniyah, *Lessons from Aceh Terrorist De-radicalization*,

Very little research has been conducted on the disengagement of jihadis in Poso, a district in Central Sulawesi Province, formerly a hotbed of JI activity. To date, the International Crisis Group has conducted two assessments of Indonesia's disengagement programs, both nationally and in Poso in 2007 and 2008.¹² Evidence about the ad hoc nature of the programs, their reliance on off-budget funding, and mistaken assumptions with regard to the Poso programs, most notably over the selection criteria for job training programs, has provided key insights into the distance between Indonesian investments in disengagement initiatives versus their counterparts in other majority-Muslim nations. McRae's study largely concurs with the International Crisis Group in its evaluation of the main state-sponsored reintegration programs in Poso.¹³ Although McRae critiqued the programs for their poor methodology in participant selection (e.g., offering job training to the employed), he lauded them for improving relationships between the ex-combatants and the police.

We contend that Poso jihadis are disengaging from violence both physically and psychologically because of several interrelated factors. First, improved police capacity resulted in a reassessment of the costs and benefits of continued terror actions. Second, the building of interpersonal relationships with those outside the jihadi circle, pressure from parents, and changing personal and professional priorities have all created positive pressures to encourage and reinforce disengagement. Finally, growing disillusionment with the ideology, tactics, consequences, and leaders of their group led many to reflect on and reassess not only their participation in terror attacks but also to consider whether violence is actually counterproductive to their aspirations for societal change.

However, the role of the state via programs and law enforcement in fostering an atmosphere supportive of disengagement has been inconsistent at best. It is important to note that while the increased police capacity was a necessary condition for the disengagement of jihadists, it was not sufficient.

Report No. 1001, Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University (2010). For individual experiences, see Zifirdaus Adnan, "Security Issues in Southeast Asia: Understanding Indonesian Terrorism through the Story of Ali Imron," University of New England Asia Center, *Asia Papers*, no. 28 (2008); Azca, "After Jihad in Indonesia."

12. International Crisis Group, "Deradicalization and Indonesian Prisons"; idem, "Indonesia: Tackling Radicalism in Poso," *Asia Briefing*, no. 75 (January 22, 2008).

13. David McRae, "DDR and Localized Violent Conflict: Evaluating Combatant Reintegration Programs in Poso, Indonesia," *Indonesian Social Development Paper*, no. 14, World Bank (2009).

Although the disengagement narratives of the Poso jihadis often include mention of improved law enforcement, their experience of disengagement is far more complex, involving strategic, emotional, psychological, and, most important, relational factors.

We believe that Poso is a valuable case for examining the disengagement process. First, it has been woefully understudied in the literature on conflict and terrorism in Indonesia, despite the fact that it held such strategic value for JI,¹⁴ which attempted to make Poso its secure base. Second, the Poso case is unique because, among the four notable communal conflicts in Indonesia—Ambon, West Kalimantan, North Maluku, and Poso—only in Poso did the fighting change from communal violence into terrorism. Finally, given the current conditions, it is possible to gain access to a wide variety of jihadis: those who are disengaging psychologically and physically; those who have disengaged psychologically and physically; and those who have not disengaged psychologically but are serving long prison terms so they lack the capacity to mount further terror attacks. We refer to our interviewees as jihadis or jihadists because they refer to themselves as *mujahidin* (holy warriors) or the Arabic singular, *mujahid*. Since the use of the term jihadi is more widespread in the contemporary terrorism literature and both *mujahid* and jihad come from the same root in Arabic (*jhd*) (to strive, struggle), we chose to refer to them as jihadi or jihadist.

Our sampling process combined several considerations. Using the available reports and publications on jihad in Poso,¹⁵ we first identified leaders, operatives, and rank-and-file jihadis from the three major groups that played a role in the Poso conflict. These were Tanah Runtuh; Mujahidin Kayamanya, the paramilitary wing of the Islamist militant Mujahidin KOMPAK (Crisis Management/Prevention Committee); and JI. We developed a list of desired interviewees, using several methods to make contact and set up interviews. For those in detention at Regional Police Headquarters (POLDA

14. In the early to mid-2000s, JI was considered to be Southeast Asia's foremost Islamist extremist network. JI members fought in the communal conflicts in Poso and Ambon. Factions of it were responsible for the string of church bombings that occurred on Christmas Eve in 2000, the Atrium Mall bombing, the bombing/attempted assassination of the Philippine ambassador to Indonesia in 2000, and the first and second Bali bombings. Splinter groups that broke from JI were responsible for the Marriot and Ritz Carlton bombings in 2009.

15. International Crisis Group, "Deradicalization and Indonesian Prisons"; idem, "Indonesia: Tackling Radicalism"; Tito Karnavian, *Indonesian Top Secret: Membongkar Konflik Poso* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2008).

Metro) in Jakarta, we had to work through official channels via a gatekeeper from Detachment 88, the police counter-terrorism team. However, the interviews in police detention were done without the presence of the gatekeeper.

For the jihadis in three prisons in Central Sulawesi Province, Petobo Prison in Palu, Ampana Prison, and in Poso itself, our assistant, a local human rights activist, set up the interviews. She was an ideal resource, having known many of the Poso jihadis since before the conflict began. We also used snowball sampling insofar as certain jihadis recommended we speak with friends of theirs or brought those friends along to the interviews. We also visited mothers and wives of the jihadis, who are all male, which proved helpful insofar as it built good relationships that made it possible to do repeat interviews. In each instance, we conducted interviews together as a team using a list of open-ended questions. If an interviewee asked for money, we did not pursue the interview. In the end, the jihadis we interviewed provided powerful stories: all of them lived through the conflict, suffered personally from the violence, and participated in it.

In total, interviews for this article were conducted with 23 ex-jihadis in Palu, Poso, and Ampana in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Of our interview subjects, two had been members of Mujahidin Kayamanya and 20 were associated with Tanah Runtuh, JI's local Poso affiliate. One had been a member of the Salafi paramilitary group, Laskar Jihad (Holy Warriors Militia). About half professed to having been members of local youth gangs prior to the conflict. All had been motivated by a desire for revenge against Christians for actions taken during the communal violence of 1998–2002. Of those we interviewed, half had been placed on the Most Wanted List by the police, meaning they were among those believed responsible for the terrorist attacks in Central Sulawesi between 2002 and 2007. Of those interviewed, seven were members of the team of 10 (known as the “hit squad”) that masterminded the major terror attacks. The remaining two-thirds participated in those attacks in supporting roles, including making and setting bombs, conducting surveillance, and carrying out robberies and thefts under the guise of performing *ḥāʾi* (“fundraising”) for the group. At the time of the interviews, 20 were in the process of disengaging or had already disengaged. Three men had declined to disengage, but being in prison, they had little capacity for further action.

This study will first address the causes of and main actors in the conflict in Poso. Next, it will assess the extent to which jihadis involved in the violence are disengaging and analyze why these changes have taken place. Finally, it

will explain why government programs have played only a limited role in fostering such changes.

JIHAD IN POSO

Violence in Poso District can be divided into two periods: the communal conflict, which transpired between 1998 and 2002, and the terror, a series of violent attacks on mostly Christian targets between 2002 and 2007. The first and second phases of communal violence in Poso began as a series of riots between Muslim and Christian gangs. Several factors contributed to the outbreak of communal violence, including (1) economic competition over land and cash crops between indigenous Protestant Pamona villagers and Muslim Bugis and Javanese transmigrants, (2) insecurity and anxiety over political and economic status in the aftermath of the 1998 fall of the 32-year Suharto dictatorship, (3) competition among government officials over bureaucratic positions, and (4) the disintegration of bureaucratic power-sharing arrangements between indigenous Christians and Muslims.¹⁶ In short, anxiety over control of and access to state patronage, combined with weak law enforcement, created the permissive environment for violence.

In 2000, May 24–28 marked the start of a third outbreak of violence—widely viewed as the most violent in terms of both damage and the number of people killed. Considered revenge by Christians after two rounds of mainly Muslim-dominated violence, this third phase lasted through July 2000. The most egregious incident, popularly referred to as the Walisongo Massacre, occurred when a Christian militia attacked a Muslim village and Islamic boarding school at Walisongo. In this third round of violence, hundreds of people, mostly Muslims, were killed.

In the weeks following the Walisongo massacre, trainers and fighters from JI and Mujahidin KOMPAK began arriving in Poso, drawing upon the expertise of several hundred Indonesian Muslims who were either Afghan War veterans or had undergone training in the southern Philippines.¹⁷ Laskar

16. Julie Chernov Hwang, *Peaceful Islamist Mobilization in the Muslim World: What Went Right* (London: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 93–94; “INDONESIA: Breakdown: Four Years of Communal Violence in Central Sulawesi,” Human Rights Watch 14:9 (December 2002) p. 2; Lorraine Aragon, “Communal Violence in Poso, Central Sulawesi: Where People Eat Fish and Fish Eat People,” *Indonesia*, no. 71 (2001) pp. 45–79.

17. Dave McRae, “Reintegration and Localized Conflict: Security Impacts beyond Influencing Spoilers,” *Conflict, Security, and Development* 10:3 (2010), p. 408.

Jihad, the militia wing of the Ahlus Sunnah (Followers of the Tradition of the Sunnah) Communication Forum, would arrive in Poso in 2001. Although all three groups viewed themselves as protecting Muslims, there was a significant ideological division between Laskar Jihad, on the one hand, and JI and Mujahidin KOMPAK on the other. While Laskar Jihad viewed its struggle in nationalist terms, seeking to safeguard Muslims and the state against a perceived Christian onslaught at a time when state capacity was weak, JI and Mujahidin KOMPAK viewed the Indonesian government as un-Islamic and sought to undermine it.

Until the arrival of JI, Muslim fighters in Poso relied on traditional weapons such as spears, knives, and fish bombs (makeshift dynamite bombs used to kill fish).¹⁸ JI's trainers gave them military training and taught them to use firearms. The primary differences between Mujahidin KOMPAK's and JI's strategy for recruitment lay in the timeline and requirements for participation in jihad. For JI, joining in *jihad qital* (holy war) was the culmination of one month of religious indoctrination carried out by JI members, one month of military training conducted by JI trainers, and ongoing religious preparation through smaller *halaqah* (religious study circles).¹⁹ Mujahidin KOMPAK required a shorter, three week to one month course, which focused more on military training, preferring a "learn by doing approach."²⁰ The arrival of the jihadi militias marked a decisive shift in the conflict, providing the Muslim side with a significant military advantage during the fighting in 2001.

In the course of the relationship between the local and the outside jihadis who came to Poso, each used the other for its own purposes. On the one hand, JI wanted to use Poso as a secure base where it could implement Islamic law, socialize its message via *dakwah* (activities to encourage Muslims to become more pious), and generate some much needed income via the cacao trade.²¹ On the other hand, for the majority of Poso jihadis, engaging with the trainers and teachers was done for a different reason. Many of these local youths and young men in their teens and twenties had been members of youth gangs prior to the conflict, more comfortable drinking alcohol and

18. International Crisis Group, "Deradicalization and Indonesian Prisons," p. 3.

19. Idem, "Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi," *Asia Report* 74 (February 3, 2004), p. 8.

20. Ibid.

21. Idem, "Weakening Indonesia's Mujahidin Networks: Lessons from Maluku and Poso," *ibid.*, 103 (October 13, 2005), p. 3; idem, "Deradicalization and Indonesian Prisons," p. 5.

stealing chickens than memorizing the Koran. Some joined for revenge, following the death of relatives. Others were motivated by vengeful solidarity with their fellow Poso Muslims in the aftermath of the Walisongo Massacre. Indoctrinated in jihadi principles and ideas by JI and Mujahidin KOMPAK clerics when they attended religious study groups, these young men encountered ideas that legitimated a desire for revenge that was already present. Thus, the ideology and training offered by JI and Mujahidin KOMPAK may have provided a means to an end.

It is important to note that a majority of Tanah Runtu members were not even aware that their teachers were, in fact, JI members until they saw some of them arrested on television years later. One who realized this fact earlier than many of his group-mates stated, “Yes, we joined the JI network. However, I personally did not view the Poso conflict as part of the global jihad; I looked at the local context. Because there was a conflict in Poso, I joined to defend my brothers in the area. When JI members came to help us, we welcomed them!”²² To be sure, some Poso jihadis were attracted to the global jihad, but a majority were “situational mujahidin,” fighters by force of circumstance.²³ As such, they remained true to their local grievances and agendas.

Just when the local jihadis felt they had gained an upper hand in the fighting, in December 2001 two key Indonesian leaders, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, then coordinating minister for Security Affairs, and Yusuf Kalla, then coordinating minister for People’s Welfare, concluded with religious leaders from both sides the Malino I Peace Accord. Indonesian security forces also increased their presence in the area. In August 2002, conflict again flared up, but thereafter the security situation in Poso improved to the point that most fighters felt it no longer necessary nor in their interests to pursue continued attacks.²⁴ For jihadis from JI-Tanah Runtu and Mujahidin KOMPAK-Kayamanya, however, the Malino Accord was either a failure or a humiliation. One senior operative from Tanah Runtu offered his personal reflections on Malino and the events that transpired thereafter:

In my opinion, the Malino Peace Accords did not touch the roots of the problems. . . . That is why we organized protests. [Initially] we listened to our

22. Interview, former member of the elite level paramilitary militia (*askari 1*), Tanah Runtu, Petobo Prison, Palu, Indonesia, July 2010.

23. International Crisis Group, “Weakening Indonesia’s Mujahidin Networks,” pp. 19–20.

24. McRae, “Reintegration and Localized Conflict,” p. 408.

elders, including Pak Adnan [Arsal].²⁵ . . . We expressed our discontent but when the government failed to listen, we began to attack [Christian] villages. Then, we all became wilder. [We committed] *fa'i* (robbery). We recruited new people and we expanded our operations. We carried out the Christmas bombing in Palu. The actions were carried out in turn between Palu and Poso . . . the last one was the mutilation of the schoolgirls.²⁶

What the senior Tanah Runtuh operative describes was the onset of what many locals referred to as “the terror.” Masterminded by Hasanuddin, a JI member who had formerly fought alongside the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao, Philippines, the terror period was characterized by bombings, shootings, and assassinations that overwhelmingly targeted Christians. Those targeted came from a cross-section of society; neither old nor young, nor women, nor children, were spared. These attacks were carried out by a sub-grouping of Tanah Runtuh members, many of whom had been among the elite *askari*, the top tier of the Tanah Runtuh militia wing; they were referred to as the hit squad or team of 10. Incidents included the killing of 13 Christian villagers in Poso and Morowali by masked gunmen in October 2003; the bombing of a minivan in November 2004 that killed six people; a bomb in May 2005 in the Tentena marketplace that killed 23; the mutilation of three schoolgirls in October 2005; the bombing of the Palu market on December 31, 2005, which left eight dead; and two homemade bombs that killed a man and a woman in 2006.²⁷ Approximately 150 people, the majority of whom were Christians, were killed between 2002 and 2007 in the revenge attacks.²⁸

On January 11 and 22, 2007, the Indonesian counter-terror unit Densus 88 conducted two raids on Tanah Runtuh after months of failed negotiations among the police, intermediaries, and the jihadi group. The police had compiled a Most Wanted List of 29 names, who they deemed to have been involved in many of the post-Malino terror attacks in Poso and Palu. During the raids, 16 people were killed, over a dozen more arrested, and the police seized a large cache of factory-made weapons and explosives.²⁹ In the

25. Adnan Arsal was a hardline Islamist cleric who was a leader of the Tanah Runtuh community.

26. Interview, senior operative from Tanah Runtuh-JI, POLDA Metro Jaya, Jakarta, July 2010.

27. Interview, Central Sulawesi observer, International Crisis Group, Jakarta, Indonesia, March 2006; “Indonesia Flashpoints: Sulawesi,” <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3812737.stm>> (June 28, 2004); and “Another Killed in Poso Blast,” *Jakarta Post*, September 10, 2006.

28. McRae, “Reintegration and Localized Conflicts,” p. 408.

29. *Ibid.*

aftermath of the arrests, most JI religious teachers fled, and most of the perpetrators of the “terror” crimes were arrested, tried, and imprisoned.³⁰

DISENGAGEMENT

Today, we can divide the Poso jihadis into three groups: those in prison, those who have been released or were never arrested and are beginning lives anew, and those who still want to perpetrate acts of violence. Many in this last group have migrated from Tanah Runtuh and Kayamanya to a new organization, JAT.³¹ Within the first two groups, many former Tanah Runtuh and Kayamanya members have disengaged from violence or are in the process of disengaging. For some, disengagement began prior to the 2007 Densus raids, when they were already moving away from Tanah Runtuh. However, for others, the raids triggered the disengagement. In both instances, it is important to understand that disengagement was a gradual process driven by a combination of rational, psychological, and relational factors.

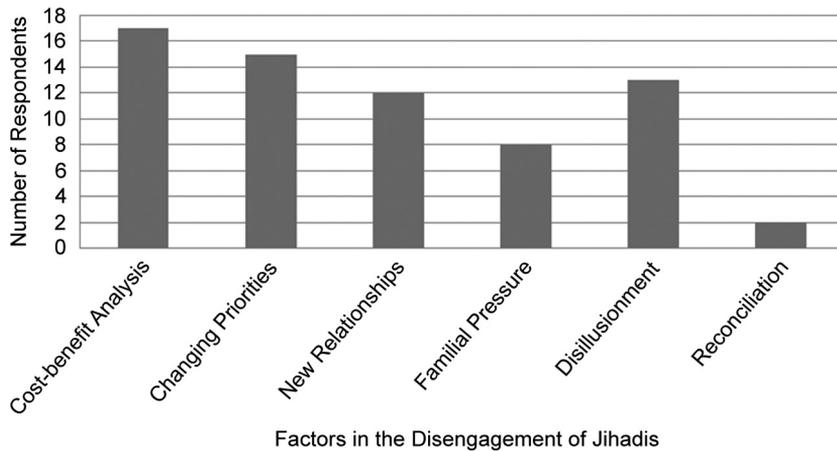
Five major factors collaborated to drive the disengagement process among Poso-based jihadis: (1) cost-benefit analyses regarding continued actions; (2) new relationships with individuals outside jihadi circles; (3) familial pressure to quit, most often from parents but also, in one instance, from a spouse; (4) changing personal and professional priorities; and (5) disillusionment with tactics, leaders, or one’s own role. In two instances, reconciliation with the victims’ families also played a small reinforcing role in disengagement because it rehumanized the victims. These factors work in tandem (see Figure 1).

One significant factor contributing to almost all cases of disengagement was a cost-benefit assessment, which occurred in response to the changing situation in Poso. First, the January 2007 raids by Densus 88, the police counter-terror team, on Tanah Runtuh led to the arrests or killing of many of the perpetrators of the terror actions, which disrupted the ability of the group’s hit squad members to launch operations. The increased effectiveness of law enforcement impacted the decision-making calculus of jihadis in Poso; both those from JI and those from the local groups knew that further action risked exposure and arrest. Moreover, since the Christian militias had not mounted an attack in over a decade, those jihadists who saw their participation

30. International Crisis Group, “Indonesia: Tackling Radicalism,” p. 1.

31. Our overtures to JAT via their leaders or friends in Tanah Runtuh were unsuccessful.

FIGURE I. The Drivers of Disengagement among Poso Jihadis



SOURCE: By authors.

in terms of tit-for-tat violence rationalized that the current conditions did not warrant further action. One Poso jihadi who had been a member of Tanah Runtuh's hit squad explained his viewpoint on how the situation had changed, noting: "The Jihad . . . is not appropriate anymore because the situation has changed. During the . . . conflict, we were retaliating against one another. [The Christian militias] retaliated and killed and we retaliated and killed. That was then."³²

We would be remiss to attribute disengagement solely to external and pragmatic factors such as the Densus raids and the peaceful state of Poso. We should recall that some Poso jihadis, i.e., those on the Tanah Runtuh hit squad, continued to mount terror attacks from 2005–07 despite the fact that the Christian militias had long ceased their operations. For most individuals interviewed, disengagement was not simply a rational cost-benefit process but also a psychological and relational one as well.

Twelve of those interviewed cited new friendships and relationships developed with individuals outside the jihadi circle as fostering or reinforcing a decision to disengage. These relationships provided alternative narratives

32. Interview, former member of hit squad (t), Tanah Runtuh, Petobo Prison, Palu, Indonesia, January 2012.

for understanding the Poso conflict, enabled the humanization of those once cast as “enemies”, encouraged individuals to chart a new non-violent course to achieve their goals, and reinforced not only the individual’s commitment to peaceful behavior but the broader idea of peaceful coexistence. In some cases, these interactions engendered friendships; in others they prompted admiration for persons who held differing views. For one hit squad member from Tanah Runtu, creation of these interpersonal relationships was instrumental to his decision to turn himself in, particularly the friendship he had formed with a human rights activist who hid him from the police, and with her friends in the human rights NGO. As the former hit squad member put it, “I observed that she saw the conflict in Poso was not a conflict between Muslims and Christians. [As] the conflict became protracted, each side took revenge. She shared her views with me. I mingled with the group [members of the NGO] and I learned from them.”³³

For Nasir Abas, the former commander of Mantiqi 3, JI’s training region, who now helps the police in their disengagement efforts, conversations in prison reinforced his decision to disengage, even though it meant breaking solidarity with his friends:

I saw that my friends refused to surrender at the time when I chose to surrender. I was concerned that my friends would be displeased with me. I explained these feelings to Ustad [Teacher] Nasir Abas and he replied, “Don’t think about that. Before you surrendered to the police, there were already many people who had surrendered.” He boosted my spirit.³⁴

For one *ustad* from Java, who played a role in both Mujahidin KOMPAK and JI, the key to change was a friendship formed in prison with another prisoner, the Reverend Rinaldy Damanik, general secretary of the Central Sulawesi Christian Church Synod and widely seen by local Muslims as a major Christian provocateur.³⁵ The relationship led the *ustad* to reconsider his prior views and decide that violence was “counter-productive” at this juncture both in Poso and nationally. In our interview, we saw the clearest

33. Interview, former member of hit squad (2), Tanah Runtu, Petobo Prison, Palu, Indonesia, July 2010.

34. Ibid.

35. According to the International Crisis Group, “Damanik was sentenced to three years in prison after homemade firearms were found in a vehicle in which he was riding in August 2002.” See International Crisis Group, “Weakening Indonesia’s Mujahidin Networks,” p. 11.

evidence of the power of friendship to reinforce peaceful behavior and the idea of non-violent coexistence. When we asked the *ustad* where he gained new awareness and new thinking, he answered:

It was from the result of reflection and experience. We mixed with the Reverend Damanik. We were so close to him in prison. We played sports and ate together. Why shouldn't it be this way outside of prison? Damanik suggested we start a peace campaign after we are released. However, people responded negatively. They considered me as a traitor. They ask, "Why are you so close to Damanik, the mastermind of the Poso conflict?" I said, "Let bygones be bygones. There is [now] law enforcement."³⁶

In both cases above, building interpersonal relationships with those outside the Tanah Runtuh or KOMPAK-Kayamanya circles exposed the individuals to new ways of thinking, helping to reorient their mind-sets toward peaceful alternatives and serving as a catalyst for their personal processes of disengagement.

Alongside the building of new relationships, a powerful existing relationship—between parent and child—also played a role in the decisions of eight jihadis to disengage. Parental pressure at key moments reinforced a shift toward disengagement. For eight young men, seeing their parents' sadness, shock, fear, or shame at their actions, or their relief at a decision to surrender, pushed them further toward disengagement. One hit squad member from Tanah Runtuh reflects on his parents' emotional appeal: "I escaped [Tanah Runtuh] on January 22 [during the Densus raids]. Soon after, I went home. My parents asked me to surrender. Initially, I refused. It was impossible to surrender myself to the enemy. My parents were crying. It was the first time I saw my father cry. Then, I followed the wishes of my parents."³⁷

In approximately half the interviews conducted with Tanah Runtuh jihadis in 2011 and 2012, and in a majority of interviews with hit squad members, who carried out major operations, the informants said the support of their parents for disengagement strongly influenced their thinking. However, the converse was also true. Parental support for terror actions emboldened and hardened an individual. For example, one hit squad member from Tanah

36. Interview, with an *ustad*, from Java, former leader of Mujahidin KOMPAK, and current member of JL, Jakarta, July 2010.

37. Interview, former member of hit squad (3), Tanah Runtuh, Petobo Prison, Palu, Indonesia, July 2010.

Runtuh professed to have the full support of his parents in conducting revenge attacks because the family had lost over 20 members in the Wali-songo Massacre. According to this individual, “My mother said that if I gave myself up, they [my parents] would kill me.”³⁸ Among those we interviewed, he was one of the few who held fast to the hardline position, contending that if he were released from prison, he would immediately take up arms again.

Changing priorities also played a significant role in disengagement. Now that Poso was peaceful and Tanah Runtuh’s activities were limited to study groups, jihadis were turning their attention to their families and to opportunities to earn a living. In some cases, an individual had a profession prior to the conflict, which he resumed after disengaging. In other cases, the birth of a child or a second child prompted a spouse or a parent to plead with the youth to halt violence. Through reflection, the individual chose to prioritize providing for his family over external concerns.

One should not underestimate the extent to which becoming a parent can act as a “pull factor” to encourage disengagement. One Tanah Runtuh jihadi who participated in the Tentena Market bombing in May 2005 explained how having children had shaped his thinking:

All of my children were born when I was in prison. I have three sons . . . I need to focus on my family. When I get out of prison, if I have funds, I will buy a cacao plantation. . . . I want to raise my children and send them to school. My hope is that they won’t be like me, drinking and fighting. I want to teach them what is good and what is bad. To reach the highest level of education they can possibly achieve.³⁹

Another Tanah Runtuh jihadi, from the first generation of recruits, explained how his wife prevailed upon him to stop his activities: “What pressured me most is my wife. She said, ‘In the future, if there is a major outbreak of unrest, you go ahead [and fight]. But now, look to us first. The family must be taken care of.’ In the end, I focused on my family first.”⁴⁰

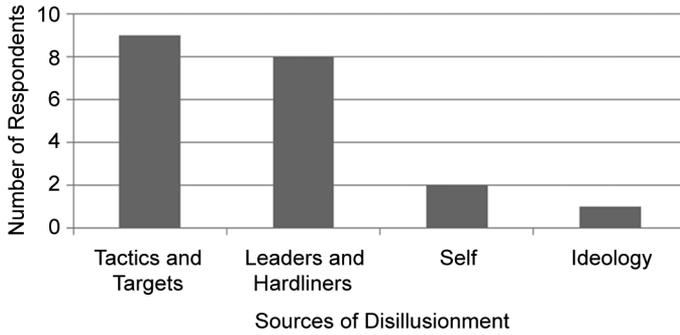
Several Tanah Runtuh and Kayamanya members noted the importance of good jobs in ensuring that the former combatants are too busy with their professional and familial duties to fight:

38. Interview, member of hit squad (4), Ampaña Prison, Ampaña, Indonesia, January 2012.

39. Interview, member of Tanah Runtuh, Petobo Prison, Palu, Indonesia, July 2011.

40. Interview, former member of hit squad (1), Tanah Runtuh, Palu, Indonesia, January 2012.

FIGURE 2. Sources of Disillusionment among Poso Jihadis



SOURCE: By authors.

As for the Tanah Runtuh *ikhwan* [brothers] in Poso, they are ready to go to war again, if attacked. But if there is no attack, it is guaranteed that will never happen since most of our friends are busy with work. There are those who became contractors. [One friend] was in and out of prison. Finally, he was given a job and he forgot everything because he had his job.⁴¹

The view that employment would play a key role in keeping Poso peaceful and the fighters disengaged was a point echoed repeatedly in interviews. This was true irrespective of whether an individual had disengaged from Tanah Runtuh by leaving the movement entirely, or still attended study groups; whether one was in prison or not; and across education levels.

The final common trend among the disengaging Poso jihadis was a profound sense of disillusionment. Concern over the terror tactics employed and their targets were the factors most frequently cited by disillusioned jihadis. Several indicated that they held reservations even during the terror period in Poso, but solidarity, deference to their seniors' knowledge of Islam, and a desire for revenge kept them from speaking openly at the time. With the benefit of hindsight, two felt disappointed in their own roles in a specific terror action. One became disillusioned by the radical ideology his seniors had preached (see Figure 2).

For some, the seeds of disillusionment sprouted from personal misgivings over targets and tactics, for example, assassinating someone who had no direct

41. Ibid.

role in the violence itself. One former hit squad member from Tanah Runtu who participated in the assassination of a prosecutor, reflected on the internal conflict he was feeling at the time of the action:

[After the assassination], I went back to Poso. Because I did it, I felt (?) . . . However, we were given religious advice that it had been the right thing to do. We had been attacked, and we needed to defend ourselves. Earlier, I had not understood why [the prosecutor] had become a target. He was not from Poso. He never bothered our brothers and sisters in Poso. But [our seniors] explained he disparaged syariah [Islamic law]. I was [actually] trying to avoid [participating] at the time; I told [my senior], “I have no weapon.” He said he had a weapon for me. If he had said he had no weapon in Palu, I could have returned home to Poso. I tried to avoid it, but he said he had the weapon.⁴²

Later, reconciliation with the victim’s wife would reinforce this initial cognitive opening. Seeing her in tears in the courtroom enabled the young man to step outside the prism of ideology and “look at the events from a human point of view.”⁴³ Thus, when the ruling came down and he received a sentence of eight years in prison, he stated that he would not appeal the ruling. “I accepted [it]. I am sincere because of what I have done. The late prosecutor’s wife also accepted it. She forgave me.”⁴⁴

For many jihadis, tactical disagreements with their seniors and with JI more broadly came from either the indiscriminate use of violence (i.e., bombings) or other violent acts. One *ustad* from Java who fought in Poso and was active in both KOMPAK and JI pointed to the adverse consequences of violence for JI as an organization and the inappropriateness of violence at the time. Since Indonesia was not part of Darul Harb (The Abode of War, where jihad can legitimately be waged), *dakwah* (Islamic propagation) was a more appropriate approach to achieving JI’s goals. While the *ustad* did not discount the legitimacy of their former actions in Poso, now that Poso was at peace, indiscriminate violence served neither the short-term nor the long-term interests of JI. He noted:

42. Interview, former member of hit squad (2), Tanah Runtu, Petobo Prison, Palu, Indonesia, July 2010.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

I have said, “Don’t do such violence. We will have more burdens and difficulties after you conduct such actions. For example, after . . . the Aceh training⁴⁵ [in 2010], many people who should have been freed with requirements have been imprisoned again by Densus 88. . . . Such an action is counter-productive for us. I feel sorry for my imprisoned friends.”⁴⁶

Another senior operative from Tanah Runtuh reflected on his thoughts at the time of his arrest in order to highlight the disillusionment he had felt with his own actions. “It was my own fault that I was imprisoned. I was asked to contemplate because what I had done had really crossed the line.”⁴⁷

For eight individuals, disillusionment centered not only on tactics but also on their seniors and their leaders. One Tanah Runtuh member who had attended military training in Mindanao with JI, expressed how he felt misled by his former friends, who revised their own views on the permissibility of violence after indoctrinating him and others:

I observed that the struggle was steered by dishonest people in my group. In the past, my friends were hardliners. But when they were arrested, they changed . . . they divulged everything. Before they were arrested, they said that we had to attack America and its allies, including the government of Indonesia. But, when they were arrested, they said that jihad was not right. . . . If the teaching was wrong, they should have not taught us about it.⁴⁸

In effect, disillusionment played a key role in the decision to disengage from violence for many ex-jihadis. For two, the seeds of disillusionment were planted early—with misgivings about the target of an attack. For many, disillusionment crept in as they reflected while imprisoned on their own behavior. For others, disenchantment began while they were in prison and escalated after release in tandem with new opportunities and new relationships. Although disappointment is common to a majority of the interviews,

45. In 2010, disgruntled militants from JI, KOMPAK, and smaller extremist groups attempted to establish a secure base in Aceh, Sumatra, to use as a launching pad for operations and in which to establish Islamic law. Before the base could become operational, they were discovered by the local police; the participants were arrested, killed, or are currently in hiding. Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, the leader of JAT and former religious head of JI, was arrested, tried, and convicted of helping to fund the operations.

46. *Ustad* interview.

47. Interview, former hit squad leader (6), Tanah Runtuh, POLDA Metro Jaya, Jakarta, Indonesia, July 2010.

48. Interview, member of Tanah Runtuh, Poso, Indonesia, July 2010.

its underlying causes and timing vary. As one hit squad member explained, “When we were together, we thought with one mind. When we were separated, we began to think for ourselves again.”⁴⁹

These five factors—cost-benefit reasoning, new relationships with individuals outside the jihadi circle, familial pressure, changing priorities, and disillusionment—often work together in reinforcement loops. Although the experience of disengagement varies from individual to individual, among those who are in the process of disengaging, their experience often includes two or three of these factors. One factor may act as a cognitive opening; over time, other factors reinforce it, pushing the individual further along the pathway to disengagement. In one instance, a member of the first group of recruits to Tanah Runtuh fell in love, married, and started a family. He had already had a profession prior to the Poso conflict: he’d been an accomplished builder, working equally well in wood and stone. His wife attempted to persuade him to focus on the family, especially now that Poso was peaceful. With the need to provide for his family foremost in his mind, he began to pull away from his Tanah Runtuh friends, despite being a member of the hit squad. In time, the friends stopped asking him to participate in their activities. He no longer considers himself a member of Tanah Runtuh⁵⁰ today, although he remains friendly with its members.⁵¹ Thus, in this instance, changing priorities, familial pressure, and the peaceful state of Poso reinforced one another as factors facilitating the process of disengagement.

We should stress that disengagement for *all* those interviewed was conditional. Should the Christian militias attack again, they all asserted that they would resume fighting without hesitation. One jihadi from the first generation of Tanah Runtuh recruits explains the conditionality of disengagement in the following terms: “It is like this. If the ‘red’ (e.g., Christian) militia attack us again, I am ready.”⁵² However, if that attack never came or until that time, he was happy to continue his life as a civil servant.⁵³

49. Interview, former member of hit squad (2), Tanah Runtuh, Petobo Prison, Palu, Indonesia, July 2010.

50. Today, Tanah Runtuh members are no longer carrying out terror attacks. Some former members who still wanted to conduct attacks have migrated to JAT.

51. Interview, former member of hit squad (5), Tanah Runtuh (5), Palu, Indonesia, January 2012.

52. Interview, member of the *ikwan awal* (original generation/first generation) of Tanah Runtuh, Palu, Indonesia, July 2011.

53. *Ibid.*

This sentiment was mirrored by nearly all interviewees, irrespective of whether they had disengaged or were in the process of disengaging. The points that emerge from this interview—willingness to respond in kind if attacked, shifting priorities in the meantime, and the expectation that an attack would someday occur—were common to all interviews of disengaging or disengaged jihadis. This indicates that a lack of trust between the Muslim and Christian communities remains a problem in Poso, which points to broader challenges with law enforcement, reconciliation, and reintegration.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

Examining psychological factors contributing to the disengagement of the Poso jihadis raises the question of how extensively police and government involvement have contributed to the process. To appropriately answer that question, it is essential to discuss two interrelated issues: (1) law enforcement efforts and (2) the timing of the reintegration programs. In this section, we contend that the role of the state and law enforcement in the disengagement process has been ad hoc and inconsistent at best, and a hindrance at worst. This inconsistency has undermined the state's ability to play a meaningful role in disengagement in Poso.

Treatment of Detainees

One key issue has been the treatment of detainees. When Brigadier General Suryadharma was head of Densus 88, the police counter-terror team, he embarked on a new strategy for engaging terror detainees, which he termed the “soft approach.” The two key components were treating imprisoned jihadis humanely and practicing *silaturahmi* (Arabic: literally, “maintaining friendship”) via telephone calls or visits to former jihadis and/or their families, assisting them with their daily needs, etc. The goal of this approach was to undermine the perception among jihadis that the police and the state were un-Islamic and to encourage cooperation in interrogations.

However, the approach was carried out inconsistently. On the one hand, two members of the hit squad who surrendered found to their surprise that they were treated humanely. Police helped arrange the marriage of one former Tanah Runtuh hit squad member at police headquarters in Jakarta. This action not only shifted his perception of the government and police but also

helped in deradicalization, insofar as it caused him to reassess his views on the implementation of *syariah* in Indonesia:

Initially, I considered [the police] *thogut* [un-Islamic]. However, they treated me humanely, providing food and a bed in POLDA Metro. Initially, I argued that the police had made a big mistake following Indonesian laws [because] they are man made. I favor Islamic law. However [I realize], it would be difficult to implement Islamic law in Indonesia because five or six religions are officially accepted. To implement *syariah* takes time. I now preach Islam patiently because Islam teaches ethics among humans. I have realized that [the police] could not be characterized as *thogut* as I thought. Some Densus members pray and sometimes we chat with them. I have changed my mind about the police after times of deep reflection.⁵⁴

In the above instances, humane treatment by the police played a reinforcing role in the disengagement trajectory of the two individuals. While the approach did not spark a cognitive opening in itself, it reinforced the effects of disillusionment, parental pressure, and new relationships.

On the other hand, according to our interview subjects, the default methods of the police showed a lack of humaneness and a tendency to torture. In repeated interviews, our informants stated that those who surrendered were treated humanely while those who were arrested by the authorities, especially local authorities, faced up to a week of torture at the hands of their interrogators. A senior member of the Tanah Runtuh hit squad responsible for numerous terrorist attacks on civilian targets in and around Poso discussed his own experience with torture, saying, “They tortured me thoroughly and their methods were extraordinary. They stripped me naked and used wires. They stabbed me in my face with a rolled up newspaper until I bled. They beat me using full water bottles. There was blood all over.”⁵⁵

The use of torture reinforced the jihadi’s sense of vengeance and fueled his desire to continue violent attacks following his release from prison. The continued use of torture after the start of the “soft approach” highlights the ad hoc and inconsistent nature of anti-terror efforts. Although those who surrendered were not tortured, those who were arrested were frequently

54. Interview, member of hit squad (3), Tanah Runtuh, Petobo Prison, Palu, Indonesia, July 2010.

55. Interview, member of hit squad (6), Tanah Runtuh, Ampana Prison, Ampana, Indonesia, January 2012.

tortured irrespective of the nature of their alleged crimes or their standing in the organization. The widespread use of torture has only served to heighten distrust of the police, which has inadvertently created a new security situation—the police have become the target of choice for militants who have decided to continue violence.

Rehabilitation and Reconciliation Initiatives

The state did not rely on law enforcement alone in responding to the situation in Poso. Several reintegration programs were conducted targeting former combatants there, two of which took place between late 2007 and early 2008. In one instance, the Central Sulawesi provincial police provided approximately 30 Muslim participants with short courses of vocational training and in-kind business capital assistance. In the second instance, the Poso District government provided one-time cash payments of Rp 10 million (US\$1,000) to approximately 170 individual Muslim recipients in the first stage and to 90 Christian recipients in the second stage.⁵⁶ Finally, the local government and the police also attempted ad hoc initiatives.

However, many of these programs were poorly conceived. For example, many ex-jihadis who were offered the opportunity to participate in the job training program were already employed.⁵⁷ In addition, the programs were quite small in scope and quite rushed in implementation. When we interviewed bureaucrats from the agency responsible for designing and running the program, they suggested that key tasks like participant selection were complicated by small budgets and the fact that all funds had to be spent during a single fiscal year.⁵⁸ Thus, there was insufficient time for careful planning and candidate selection.⁵⁹ The local government and police have also attempted to assist local jihadis to reintegrate into society by providing connections, start-up money, skills training, and contracts. Even though these activities have been conducted on an ad hoc basis, the results have been

56. For further information on these two programs, see McRae, “Reintegration and Localized Conflict”; idem, “DDR and Localized Violent Conflict.”

57. Ibid.

58. Interview, head of National Unity and Community Protection Agency, Poso, Indonesia, July 2010.

59. Interview, former member of Tanah Runtuh, Poso, Indonesia, July 2010.

tangible to a wider array of ex-jihadis. The goal of this endeavor, as McRae has correctly suggested, is to make them too busy to fight.⁶⁰

These reintegration programs and activities, however, have had several unintended consequences. First, as a result of their connections and contacts, some former jihadis have become important players in the local political economy, not because they are good at business but because they are former jihadis. Thus, their status has become a source of power to negotiate their interests with local stakeholders. One ex-jihadi we interviewed openly acknowledged a close relationship with the current elected district head, a Christian, who needed strong support from Muslim ex-jihadis. This enabled the former jihadi to win several government construction contracts despite the fact that he lacked the ability to deliver them on time or assure quality control.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

Drawing from this research, we can put forth several conclusions generalizable beyond Poso to jihadis in Indonesia and more broadly. First, disengagement, not deradicalization, is the appropriate term to employ when examining why extremists cease participating in acts of terrorism. Deradicalization is the delegitimization of the ideology underpinning the use of violence, while the term disengagement refers to the behavior of an individual militant: it is more definable, concrete, and measurable. In examining the disengagement of the Poso militants, we were able to identify distinct factors and pathways that engendered increasing commitments to disengagement over time.

Second, disengagement is a complex phenomenon comprising mutually reinforcing factors. In the case of the Poso jihadis, the most popular pathway to disengagement involved (1) a cost-benefit assessment of the suitability of continued violent actions given the current political and security context, (2) familial pressure, and (3) changing personal and professional priorities. The five drivers of disengagement in Poso also have relevance for Indonesian jihadis outside Poso. One Javanese JI and KOMPAK member who trained Mujahidin Kayamany members and fought in Poso cited three factors in his disengagement process: (1) the realization that violence was counterproductive for his

60. McRae, "Reintegration and Localized Conflict," pp. 413–15.

61. Interview, former leader of Mujahidin KOMPAK, Poso, Indonesia, July 2010.

goals and those of JI at this point in time, (2) the building of new relationships with individuals outside the jihadi circle, and (3) the need to focus on his businesses in order to provide for his growing family.

Third, disengagement can often be conditional. Each person interviewed said he would resume fighting if the Christian militias attacked again. What is troubling for understanding disengagement is not that the ex-jihadis would take up arms if attacked but that they expect to be attacked at some point in the future. It should be noted, moreover, that the conditionality of disengagement is not unique to Poso. In interviews conducted with jihadis on Java from JI and KOMPAK, each said there would be conditions under which he too would resume fighting. What varied between Java and Poso was that the conditions set by the Java-based fighters were often so unrealistic (e.g., invasion of Indonesia by a foreign power) that there was little likelihood of future engagement, whereas the conditions for re-engagement among Poso jihadis were relatively plausible.

Finally, while the state can play a role in encouraging disengagement, it is more likely to succeed through humane treatment and well-conceptualized and implemented programs. This article has shown that the use of humane treatment has clear positive spillover effects for disengagement, while the use of torture can breed hatred and greater mistrust of the police. Moreover, while disengagement programs can be beneficial, such programs must be tailored to the target audience in the specific locale in which they operate. What is needed in Poso, going forward, are efforts to reintegrate the ex-jihadis with the larger community on the basis of common economic or educational objectives to foster a broader sense of identity, encourage economic empowerment, and weaken the existing jihadi contract power base.