

# **ISIS IN AMBON: THE FALLOUT FROM COMMUNAL CONFLICT**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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The emergence of pro-ISIS groups in Indonesia – and the formation of the team that undertook the January 2016 Jakarta attacks – are a result in part of bonds forged among Muslim fighters in Ambon and Poso in the years immediately following the fall of Soeharto.<sup>1</sup> These two communal conflicts permanently changed the map of radical Islam in Indonesia. Today the Indonesians who lead pro-ISIS organisations at home and abroad can draw on a web of contacts going back decades for recruits, ideological reinforcement, protection and occasionally financial support.

The personal network of one man arrested in the aftermath of the January attacks is a case in point. Nazaruddin Mochtar, also known as Harun and Abu Gar, is a former prisoner with a long history of violence who in late 2015 became the head of military affairs for Partisans of the Islamic Caliphate (Jamaah Ansjarul Khilafah Islamiyah, JAKI), the group that carried out the attacks. The conflicts in Ambon and Poso, which erupted when he was in his late twenties, arguably changed his life. They also gave him contacts across the archipelago. Understanding how he activated those contacts at different stages of his career may provide clues to how some pro-ISIS groups expand beyond their initial base.

Abu Gar's story also prompts the question as to whether any intervention, governmental or non-governmental, could have changed this man's trajectory and either pulled him back from violence or limited his influence over others. There were several potential opportunities: after his initial arrest on terrorism charges in 2004; during his subsequent seven years of incarceration; after his release in April 2011 when he immediately went back to Ambon; and after his identification as a participant in a key ISIS meeting in East Java in November 2015. Now back awaiting trial for his role in recruiting personnel for the Jakarta operation, there is a new opportunity to undermine his influence, even if the chances of changing his ideological commitment to violence are slim.

## II. ABU GAR AND THE EARLY LINKS

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Abu Gar, born in Cilacap on 24 April 1973, was a product of state schools, not Islamic boarding schools. He became active in Darul Islam (DI) in 1994 at the age of 21, and in 1999, joined the Abu Bakar Battalion, a Jakarta-based group of younger, militant DI members who became outraged in 1999 over their leaders' lack of action in response to attacks on Muslims in Ambon.<sup>2</sup> (A fellow member, Mohammad Ali, was one of the perpetrators of the January 2016 Jakarta attacks.) For travel funds and military training, the militants turned to KOMPAK.

KOMPAK, an acronym for the Crisis Action Committee, was a conservative charity set up in 1998 to provide humanitarian aid to Muslims in need, but under the leadership of its Solo branch, it became one of the main engines for sending fighters and supplies to Ambon.<sup>3</sup> Abu Gar left in 2000 and spent the next several months guarding the KOMPAK base around the State Islamic Institute (STAIN) in Batu Merah, Ambon but also obtaining some combat experience.

After a new wave of communal conflict erupted in Poso in 2000, KOMPAK's leaders instructed Abu Gar in 2001 to move there to train fighters at a camp near the shore of Lake Poso in Panda Jaya, South Pama. Several other groups had camps in the same area, including Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Makassar-based Laskar Jundullah and a Darul Islam faction from West Java known as Ring Banten. One leader of the latter was Iwan Dharmawan alias Rois, and he and Abu Gar, after initially competing for

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1 We use the acronym ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Sham) rather than ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or IS (Islamic State) because that is how it is known in Indonesia.

2 Some of the well-known members of the Abu Bakar Battalion were Mohamad Ikhwan alias Abu Umar, now in prison for trying to smuggle in arms from Mindanao for his Darul Islam faction; and two men who died in the police operations following the breakup of a terrorist training camp in Aceh, Enceng Kurnia alias Arham and Ahmad Sayyid Maulana.

3 KOMPAK, the charity, was set up by the conservative Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council (Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia, DDII) and based in Jakarta but the Ambon fighters, who came to be known as Mujahidin KOMPAK, were organised out of the Islamic Center in Solo by Aris Munandar. See International Crisis Group, "Indonesia Background: Jihad in Central Sulawesi", Asia Report No.74, 3 February 2004.

recruits, eventually joined forces.<sup>4</sup> Rois, sentenced to death for the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta, worked with Abu Gar from prison on the Jakarta attacks. Lasting bonds among fighters from across Indonesia were established at the Panda Jaya camps, and several eventually went to Syria to join ISIS.<sup>5</sup>

A separate military training session that Abu Gar conducted in the same period in the hills around Tangkura, Poso Pesisir also involved Daeng Koro alias Abu Autat, a man who fifteen years later became the chief strategist for Santoso's Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia (Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, MIT) in Poso until he was killed by the Indonesian police in April 2015; and Muhammad Ali, the Abu Bakar Battalion member and Jakarta attacker. Many of the relationships established in Poso between late 2000 and early 2002 were reactivated in the interests of ISIS after being dormant in some cases for more than a decade.

In 2002 Abu Gar returned to the Jakarta area and became active in recruiting and mentoring Darul Islam cadres as well as running a small business. At the request of Ring Banten leaders he had met in Poso, he helped with outreach activities in the old DI stronghold of Cigarung, Sukabumi, looking for a new generation of fighters to imbue with a spirit of jihad. He only managed to recruit seven youths, but one of them was Heri Golun, who two years later blew himself up in a car bomb in front of the Australian Embassy.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, as would happen with almost every group he worked with, Abu Gar fell out with the DI leadership over his tendency to find fault with their Islamic practices.

Part of the problem was that Abu Gar had grown more militant after coming under the influence of a preacher named Oman Rochman, better known as Aman Abdurrahman. In 2003, he had begun attending Aman's religious discussion group (*pengajian*) at the at-Taqwa Mosque in Tanah Abang, Jakarta that several former Abu Bakar Battalion members attended. Aman himself had been the imam at a Salafi mosque in South Jakarta, al-Sofwah, from which he was expelled for his extremism.

Aman was convinced by the arguments of Jordanian radical Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and a group of Wahhabi religious scholars in Najd, Saudi Arabia that the most serious forms of idolatry among Muslims were to be found in worship and politics. The first involved visiting graves (*ziarah*), using amulets and charms to ward off evil, and other practices common among traditional Muslims in Java. The second involved support for democracy because it left sovereignty in the hands of human beings rather than God. Aman branded Muslims in both groups as *kafir* or non-believers, and he regarded anyone who worked for a democratic government, from state elementary school teachers to the president, as apostates. Following al-Maqdisi, he believed that all efforts should be concentrated not on joining the global jihad of al-Qaeda but on bringing down the idolatrous government at home.<sup>7</sup>

Aman and Abu Gar found inspiration in each other. Aman turned Abu Gar into more of a *takfiri*; Abu Gar persuaded Aman of the need for preparation and training for jihad, which in jihadi circles were as fundamental as ablutions and prayer. Beginning in December 2003, he began a series of training programs for members of Aman's discussion group, who referred to themselves as Muwahidun (believers in the oneness of God).<sup>8</sup> The program involved physical fitness training as well as instruction in how to make pipe bombs and Molotov cocktails. In March 2004, as they were preparing bombs at a member's house in Cimanggis, south of Jakarta, a few exploded prematurely and blew out part of the roof. No one was killed, but Aman and his followers were arrested by police. The Cimanggis group is another that created lasting bonds and also has a Syria connection: the man whose house was blown up, Sholeh alias Cholid, left to join ISIS in 2014 and his son appears in an ISIS video of young Indonesian and Malaysian

4 International Crisis Group, "Recycling Militants in Indonesia: Darul Islam and the Australian Embassy Bombing," Asia Report No.92, 22 February 2005, p.26-27.

5 The Laskar Jundullah fighters included Daeng Koro alias Abu Autat, killed in Parigi Moutong in Central Sulawesi in April 2015; Arman Galaxi, who served time in prison for the December 2002 Makassar bombing and is now in Syria; Abu Uswah, killed by Detachment 88 in January 2013 in Makassar, also involved in helping Santoso; and Amin Mude, arrested in 2015 for helping arrange travel to Syria for individuals from Makassar. The Ring Banten fighters included Rosihin Noer, killed in Syria in 2015.

6 "Recycling Militants in Indonesia", op.cit, p.29.

7 See for example Syaikh Abu Muhammad 'Ashim al-Maqdisi, *Agama Demokrasi* (Klaten, 2008). Aman wrote the introduction to this translated extract of one of al-Maqdisi's tracts about why democracy violates Islamic law.

8 Aman's followers are sometimes referred to collectively as Jamaah Tauhid wal Jihad but this was never a formally structured organisation. It rather referred to the doctrine that Aman preached, following al-Maqdisi.

children getting military training.<sup>9</sup>

Abu Gar himself managed to escape the police dragnet after Cimanggis. Helped by Abdullah Sunata, the commander of Mujahidin KOMPAK in Ambon and Poso, he fled to Ambon and hid near the KOMPAK compound in Batu Merah. When he felt it was safe, he began preaching, using Aman's writings and attracting many local youths with his message of jihad. He explained that the Indonesian government and its security forces were *kafir* because they did not uphold Islamic law. This was news to most Muslims in Ambon, many of whom had joined the fighting because they saw it as helping the government suppress Christian separatists.<sup>10</sup> For the same reason, they were willing to work with military and the paramilitary police (Brimob). Now the government they had helped defend had become the enemy.

Abu Gar also had no hesitation branding most Muslims in Ambon as *kafir* because of what he saw as their idolatrous practices. As a result, his students began to change their stance, seeing fellow Muslims and their property as legitimate targets of attack. They showed as little hesitation stealing vegetables from the market as rustling livestock from their neighbours. Abu Gar gave such thievery his blessing as *fa'i* (robbing non-Muslims to benefit jihad) and thus legitimate under Islamic law. Some activists began to call him "Abu Garong" – using an old term for robber – because he endorsed these crimes.

Abu Gar's increasing extremism alarmed KOMPAK activists who had settled in Ambon after the conflict eased, men such as such as Asep Jaja from Ciamis. They believed that if any of his followers were caught stealing, they would hurt the image of *mujahidin* as noble fighters coming to the defence of the oppressed. But they found it difficult to argue with Abu Gar because his religious knowledge was deeper than theirs and he had brought photocopies of Aman Abdurrahman's writings to back up his arguments.

Asep and his friends contacted KOMPAK in Solo for help. Sometime in late 2004 the office there sent out a young Saudi-trained scholar named Faiz alias Abu Walid to "neutralise" Abu Gar's teachings. He was temporarily able to straighten out their thinking, arguing that *fa'i* could only take place in times of war, and the robberies largely ceased.<sup>11</sup> Faiz, who later came to play an important role with ISIS in Syria, returned to Solo.<sup>12</sup>

Not long after Faiz went back, Sholeh alias Cholid from Cimanggis, who had also evaded the police, arrived in Ambon.<sup>13</sup> All the good work Faiz had accomplished was quickly undone. Sholeh settled in Kebun Cengkeh and, good student of Aman's that he was, used religious references to legitimise *fa'i* even in peacetime.<sup>14</sup> The more moderate KOMPAK activists did not have the religious knowledge to fight back and some slowly became radicalized. This became clear with an attack on a police post the following year.

9 The video, entitled "The Light of Education in the Caliphate" (Cahaya Tarbiyah di Bumi Khilafah) was posted on YouTube in March 2015 but eventually removed. Another Syria connection is through a Cimanggis participant named Kodrat, later a founder of Mujahidin of Western Indonesia. He was killed by police in 2013; his widow became the third wife of BahrumSyah. Daeng Stanza, another member, was deported by the Turkish government in 2015 trying to get to Syria.

10 Most Muslim fighters in Ambon saw the Christians they were fighting as representing an old insurgency called the Republic of the South Moluccas (Republik Maluku Selatan, RMS), even though RMS supporters played a very minor role in the conflict.

11 IPAC interview with Ambon veteran, March 2016.

12 In December 2004, Faiz alias Abu Walid left for Zamboanga, Philippines allegedly carrying funds from a Saudi donor for training and arms. He was arrested and held for nine years on charges of possessing explosives. He was finally tried and acquitted in 2013 and returned to Java where he married the widow of Bagus Budi Pranoto alias Urwah, killed by police in the aftermath of the 2009 hotel bombings. Shortly thereafter he left for Syria.

13 It was at Sholeh's house in Cimanggis where the 2004 explosion had taken place.

14 He used the case of Abu Bashir, one of Muhammad's Companions, who had robbed *kafir* to help the Muslim community without any criticism from the Prophet.

### III. THE 2005 LOKI ATTACK

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The climax came in May 2005. Several youths from Olas hamlet in West Ceram invited Asep and other KOMPAK activists to help attack Loki, a nearby Christian hamlet whose residents at the height of the conflict had carried out a scorched earth policy against neighboring Muslim areas. They wanted revenge, but they knew that Loki was guarded by a squad of Brimob men. Undeterred and by now seeing police as defenders of an idolatrous state, they proceeded with the attack. On 16 May 2005, three local youths, aided by Asep Jaja and four others from KOMPAK, crept up to the Brimob post and shot five Brimob men and their cook as they were sleeping. One of police managed to fire back, killing one of the attackers and wounding others. The attack was aborted, and the surviving perpetrators fled.

The Loki attack was the beginning of the destruction – temporarily – of jihadi cells in Ambon. It prompted police investigations not only of the attack itself but of many other acts of extremist violence going back several years that had never been properly followed up. As a result Asep Jaja and about a dozen other fighters were tracked down and prosecuted. In the course of the investigations, police also found dozens of guns and thousands of rounds of ammunition that KOMPAK had acquired after a well-known mujahidin raid in 2000 on a Brimob weapons depot in Tantui, Ambon that netted more than 1,000 guns. Weapons from that raid have continued to surface in jihadi actions across Indonesia ever since.

Abu Gar and Sholeh were among those arrested. Abu Gar was caught on 19 May for having prior knowledge of the attack and helping a suspect to flee. He was sentenced to nine years in prison. Sholeh was arrested in July and accused of throwing a grenade at a public transport driver the previous March. He received a ten-year sentence. Both were initially detained in the Waiheru Detention Center in Ambon and were recognised by the other prisoners as religious scholars. Abu Gar led discussions with the ordinary prisoners for an hour almost every morning, while Sholeh concentrated on the *ikhwan*, the inmates who were already involved in extremist organisations. They also held religious study sessions (*pengajian*) once a week after dawn prayers via handphone with Aman Abdurrahman, himself in prison outside Jakarta. All the extremist inmates attended.

In 2007 Abu Gar, Sholeh, Asep Jaja and several other inmates from Ambon with heavy sentences were moved to Java. After a brief stay at Wirogunan prison in Yogyakarta, they were all moved to Porong prison in Surabaya. There Abu Gar and Sholeh were not particularly prominent, especially after some senior JI prisoners were sent there in 2008. Among them were Maulana Yusuf Wibisono and Arif Syaifudin, both of whom had overseas military experience. Maulana had been on the Afghanistan border in 1991, while Arif had taught field engineering at the JI camp in Mindanao. They immediately exerted a strong influence on the extremist prisoners and for the most part, a constructive one. Both disagreed with Aman's teachings and tried to correct the *takfiri* thinking of Abu Gar and Sholeh.

Nevertheless, while the two from Ambon lost some ground to more experienced jihadis from Java, they continued to preach, especially among the ordinary criminal offenders. One who regularly took part in their study group was Muadz alias Roni alias "Mr Tattoo", a convicted murderer from Kediri, East Java, whom Sholeh had befriended when he arrived in 2008. Roni was released in 2011. Instead of returning home, he went to Bima on Sholeh's recommendation to study with one of Aman's students there, Iskandar alias Abu Qutaibah. Iskandar and Sholeh had been fellow members of Aman's discussion group in Jakarta in 2003. Roni studied for a year in Bima, reportedly staying at the extremist boarding school, Pesantren Umar bin Khattab. In 2012, he left for Poso to take part in a military training course run by Santoso. He then became involved in several jihadi actions in Poso and Bima, including the murders of police officers. He was tracked down and killed by counter-terrorism police in front of his home in Kepung, Kediri in January 2015.

Porong prison also seemed to reinforce the bonds among the Ambon inmates, so not only did Abu Gar and Sholeh grow closer, but they also deepened their ties to some of the Ambonese who had been arrested in the wake of the Loki attack. One of these was Said Laisouw alias Aco, who was serving a ten-year sentence for a 2005 grenade attack.

In April 2011, Abu Gar, Sholeh and Said were released. Sholeh went back to Jakarta; he and his family left for Syria in 2014. Abu Gar returned to Ambon and found that after an absence of six years, much had changed. Islamic outreach (*dakwah*) activities had risen dramatically, thanks in part to the Salafi members of the mostly Javanese Laskar Jihad militia who had decided to settle in Ambon after



the conflict died down. Their headquarters was Mahad Thoifah Mansyuroh in the area around Kebon Cengkeh. Many Ambonese who had studied in Salafi pesantrens, including some who had been sent to Yemen, had returned home to preach in Ambon and Ceram.

Jemaah Islamiyah had also expanded, as Ambonese who had been sent to JI schools in Java also returned home as *ustadz* or teachers. Two of these were Qasim Kaliki and Salman, both graduates of Darus Syhadah, the JI pesantren in Boyolali, Poso. JI's activities were supported by several relatively wealthy businesspeople in Ambon including Tomo, who ran an auto repair company.

Under these circumstances, Abu Gar had limited room for manoeuvre. If he wanted to teach or preach, he would face serious competition. His Arabic skills were no match for those educated in Salafi or JI institutions. He started small, selling herbal remedies while holding regular discussion meetings at the Nurul Izzah musholla, a small mosque near STAIN Batu Merah. Many other options, but some said it was because of Abu Gar's mouth – he was too quick to brand people *kafir* and seemed to enjoy demeaning others. He also frequently defaulted on personal debts. He nevertheless continued to promote the ideas of Aman Abdurrahman, while working as a part-time correspondent for various radical websites, including *voa-islam.com* and *muslimdaily.net*.

In September 2011, a new round of communal violence erupted in Ambon, and there was concern that Abu Gar in response was calling the old jihadi network to arms.<sup>15</sup> One person who arrived in Ambon with two friends a few weeks after the violence was Joko Jihad (real name: Joko Tri Priyanto), from Laweyan, Solo, who had fought in Ambon with KOMPAK at the same time as Abu Gar. His son, Pondo (subsequently killed fighting with Santoso in 2016), had been arrested in connection with the outbreak, and Joko was coming to try and arrange his release. Abu Gar and Said Laisouw met him on arrival and subsequently arranged for him and his friends to instruct their followers in bomb circuitry.<sup>16</sup> Joko Jihad, who had previously served time in prison for his association with terrorist Noordin Top, was re-arrested in Solo in 2012, both for activities there as well as for the Ambon training session. Abu Gar's role in hosting the training was not considered a crime.

#### IV. THE WAR IN SYRIA AND THE IMPACT IN AMBON

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By 2013, the jihad in Syria had become a hot topic among Muslim activists in Ambon. Many were caught up in the belief that the final battle at the end of time was approaching. End-of-time studies spread like wildfire, with young Muslims convinced that all the signs were present that the promised restoration of the Prophet's caliphate (*khilafah minhajul nubuwah*) was at hand.

At this stage the break between al-Qaeda and ISIS had not yet happened and in a brief display of harmony, all major extremist groups in Ambon celebrated Idul Fitri 2013 together. Supporters of different militias in Syria -- the Nusra Front, ISIS and Ahrar al-Syam -- joined forces for a drive around the city shouting "Allahu Akbar" (*takbir keliling*) as part of a program that they called "Solidarity for the Rohingya and for Syria". Only after Aman Abdurrahman came out with a declaration of support for ISIS on his website in October 2013 did Abu Gar begin his pro-ISIS campaign in Ambon.

In March 2014, when Bahrumsyah and other Aman followers held a pro-ISIS demonstration at the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle in central Jakarta, Aman organised a similar rally at the al-Fatah mosque in Ambon. It is not clear whether these events were coordinated. Hundreds attended from all organisations, including many of the released terrorists, all thrilled that the ISIS had apparently succeeded in building a state in Iraq and Syria. Already there were rumors that ISIS would soon establish the longed for caliphate of the Prophet.

Support for ISIS strengthened after its lightning victories in Sinjar, Mosul, Tal Afar, Falujah, Kirkuk and elsewhere, including its capture of oilfields. "The euphoria of victory in Iraq reached Ambon," said one man.

15 See International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: Trouble Again in Ambon", Asia Briefing No. 128, 4 October 2011. See also trial documents in the case of Tri Yatno, West Jakarta District Court, 29 November 2012.

16 Ibid.

Several days after al-Baghdadi announced the new caliphate, on the first day of the fasting month, Abu Gar traveled to the Nusakambangan prison complex, off the coast of his hometown, Cilacap, to visit Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Aman, and his old friend from Poso, Iwan Dharmawan alias Rois. They had already declared their support for ISIS and convinced Abu Gar that ISIS was in fact the *khilafah minhajul nubuwah*. Abu Gar told Aman he wanted to go Syria, but changed his mind after Aman and Rois told him that the cost would be about Rp.20 million per person. They advised him instead to organise support for ISIS in Ambon.<sup>17</sup>

The unity in the extremist community did not last long. Some of the jihadists began questioning support for ISIS after news emerged of the execution of thirteen ulama in Mosul. On 12 June 2014, Muhammad al-Mansuri, imam of the mosque where al-Baghdadi would later announce the caliphate, was killed. Two days later, twelve more were executed, all for refusing to swear oaths of allegiance. Some extremists, particularly in JI circles such as Tomo and Qasim, began expressing concerns about ISIS, particularly after the publication by a respected radical, questioning the legitimacy of the caliphate.<sup>18</sup> The book, translated into Indonesian by arrahmah.com, reached Ambon at the end of Ramadan 2014. It argued that ISIS had not followed proper consultative procedures for establishing the caliphate. The JI members' doubts increased after ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani referred to anyone who questioned ISIS as apostate and worse.

The criticism left Abu Gar unmoved. He and his students set up a new organisation, Partisans of the Caliphate in Maluku (Ansharul Khilafah Jazirah Al Muluk). Its activities consisted mainly of distributing alms and contributions to the families of arrested terrorists.

Jihadis in Ambon were confused, however, by the disputes that broke out among various Islamist militias in Syria. The ulama that many had been taught to respect, such as Abu Qatada and al-Maqdisi, were now criticising ISIS. The ISIS propaganda machine responded with tracts that Aman Abdurrahman quickly translated and posted on his website. Abu Gar then distributed these in Ambon.

The confusion over how to interpret the contending arguments led most of the extremists in Ambon to decide to send Tomo, the JI leader, to Syria to check for himself. Mas Tomo was widely respected, in part because of his wealth and contributions to the cause; his repair shop was also a frequent site for JI meetings. Tomo left for Syria in November 2014 and spent a month with al-Nusra. He heard innumerable eyewitness accounts of ISIS executions, especially of commanders of rival militias and their families. He was particularly shaken by the murder of Abu Khalid al-Suri, leader of Ahrar al-Sham, because he had been a mentor to some of the Indonesians who had trained on the Afghan border.

Mas Tomo returned to Ambon with an endless supply of ISIS atrocity stories. His account convinced JI members in Ambon, led by Qasim Kaliki, to embark on an anti-ISIS campaign. Qasim's antipathy to ISIS was only in part the result of Tomo's stories. He also had a personal dispute with Abu Gar, triggered by the latter's spreading gossip that Qasim was a womaniser. If Qasim had felt otherwise toward Abu Gar, he might have joined the pro-ISIS camp, because in fact he tended toward *takfiri* thinking, especially with regard to Indonesian officials. He was not as cavalier as Abu Gar, however, about branding any Muslims outside his own circle as a non-believer.

The rift between Qasim and Abu Gar came to a head in mid-2015. Abu Gar accused Qasim of stealing one of his protégés. A former senior terrorist convict who knew them both tried to make peace and brought them together at the Nurul Izzah musholla but they immediately got into a debate over ISIS.

17 IPAC interview, police investigator, Jakarta, March 2016.

18 This was "Jubah Sang Khilafah" by Abu Qatada Al Filistini, a controversial cleric long resident in the U.K. who was deported to Jordan in 2013 and subsequently tried and acquitted of terrorism charges.



Qasim challenged Abu Gar to a *mubahalalah* or religious debate with God as the referee.<sup>19</sup> Abu Gar readily accepted but they disagreed on the topic. Qasim wanted to debate ISIS, while Abu Gar wanted to focus on the womanising. Eventually the war of words had to be cancelled, but as a result Abu Gar declared Qasim an apostate and forbade his followers from praying with him.

Ji members were not the only anti-ISIS group in Ambon and Ceram — the Salafis were also deeply opposed. One of their active campaigners was La Jumu Tsuani, a former jihadi prisoner who had become a Salafi and opposed not only the pro-ISIS group but also the anti-ISIS group around Qasim Kaliki because of its branding of the Indonesian government as idolatrous.<sup>20</sup> Once, at a lecture at the Islamic Center Ambon in June 2016, Jumu referred to those who saw Indonesia as a kafir state as *khawarij* or extremists, referring to an early Islamic sect. After the lecture he was approached one of Qasim's followers and challenged to a debate. Jumu accepted and quoted a fatwa from the thirteenth-century scholar Ibn Taymiyah which said that whether a state was to be considered Muslim or not depended on its people, not on its rulers. Lacking the knowledge to refute him, the student left, but tensions between the Salafis and Qasim's group rose as a result, and Jumu lost no opportunity to suggest in public that Qasim and his friends were no different from the pro-ISIS groups they allegedly opposed.

## V. SPLITS AMONG ISIS SUPPORTERS IN AMBON

Pro-ISIS groups then fell out with each other. Abu Gar had about 20 followers who met at Nurul Izzah. A rival group emerged led by Yasin, who had no more than ten behind him. One of these was Ridwan Lestaluhu alias Edo, a former prisoner who had married Putri Munawaroh, widow of the man killed near Solo with Noordin Top in 2009. Yasin had preached widely among KOMPAK veterans and more recently had studied with Abu Gar. But he and Abu Gar had fallen out over the question of who should be deemed a *kafir*; he also had had direct experience with Abu Gar's verbal abuse. (This illustrates how alliances among *takfiri* may be inherently unstable because the least disagreement can lead to charges of apostasy and irrevocable splits.)

Yasin's somewhat more moderate attitude had been influenced by a man named Fajrin bin Selan, better known as Fajrun, from Iha, Ceram. After graduation from the Ji school Darus Syahadah, Fajrun had gone to teach at Pesantren al-Islam in Lamongan, a school that will be forever associated with the 2002 Bali bombers, though its leadership now is strongly against violence.<sup>21</sup> While there, he was invited by a former prisoner and al-Islam alumnus Hamzah Baya to take part in the activities of JAT Surabaya. He was eventually made part of the JAT dakwah team and often studied with one of its leaders, Syaifudin Umar alias Abu Fida at the al-Ikhlas mosque in Sidotopo. In 2011, he also was briefly assigned by JAT to preach in Bima.

In late 2012, he left al-Islam because he wanted to find a wife. He went to Balikpapan, in East Kalimantan which has a longstanding connection to al-Islam. There he was hired as the imam for the al-Ikhwan mosque. One its members and donors was a successful contractor, and Fajrun eventually married his daughter. When JAT split in 2014 over allegiance to ISIS, Fajrun elected to stay with JAT.

19 A *mubahalalah* is a kind of doctrinal duel where Allah will declare the winner by striking the loser dead, and challenges to such debates occur with some frequency in the extremist community. One interesting case in 2015 involved pro-ISIS and anti-ISIS camps. A well-known ISIS supporter named Fauzan al-Anshori, whose pesantren in Ciamis was central to the planning of the 2016 Jakarta attacks, challenged a former student, Soni, also known as Ustadz Maheer At Thuwailibi to a *mubahalalah* because Soni rejected ISIS as heretical. Fauzan reportedly said, "If the Caliph al-Baghdadi believes in heretical tenets [...] then may all the [ISIS] leaders die but save the followers. But if Soni's accusations are false, then may he be struck with lightning during the rainy season!" Soni likewise asked Allah to visit suffering on Fauzan if he proved wrong. Fauzan fell ill and entered a hospital on 11 December 2015; he died five days later. Anti-ISIS groups were convinced this was God's response to the *mubahalalah* with Soni and proof that ISIS was deviant. ISIS supporters counterattacked by questioning Soni's character and religious knowledge, apparently to show that God could never have awarded him victory in the debate and therefore Fauzan's death must have been from natural causes.

20 La Jumu had been arrested in 2012 in Ambon for selling arms to Abu Uswah, from the Makassar group working with Santoso in Poso. He was sentenced to six years under Emergency Law 11/1950 but was released in late 2015 and became a star example of "deradicalisation".

21 The school still has links to extremists through its alumni network, however. See Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Indonesia's Lamongan Network: How East Java, Poso and Syria are Linked," Report No.18, 15 April 2015.

His decision was influenced by his teacher, Abu Fida, who had become a strong ISIS supporter and in fact was deported from Malaysia after being stopped en route to Syria in December 2014. His father-in-law was also staunchly pro-ISIS. Abu Fida.

Fajrun rarely returned to Ambon and when he went back to Ceram, he did not meet Abu Gar. He was more likely to talk to Salman, one of his friends from Darus Syhadah who had become a supporter of al-Nusra. Fajrun did not condemn those who refused to swear loyalty to ISIS, but at the same time, he was close to Yasin's group, and his friends say he tried to moderate their thinking.

## VI. THE MALANG MEETING

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If Fajrun and Abu Gar rarely met in Ambon, they ran into each other at the founding meeting of Aman's pro-ISIS group in Batu, Malang in November 2015. The meeting was intended as an effort to unite all ISIS supporters in Indonesia under the banner of the Partisans of the Islamic Caliphate (Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah Islamiyah, JAKI). Participants entrusted a former member of FPI Lamongan with the day-to-day leadership since their ideological leader, Aman Abdurrahman, was in prison.<sup>22</sup> Abu Gar was named as the amir for Ambon while Fajrun became the amir for South Sulawesi.

Abu Gar was also appointed head of military affairs for the new organisation, tasked with leading training courses for members. In this he was to be helped by two old friends, Muhammad Ali and Diyan Adipriyana. Muhammad Ali was the former colleague from the Abu Bakar Battalion days. Diyan was a former prisoner who had been a member of Abu Umar's group and was also Abu Gar's brother-in-law. One idea for jihad discussed at the meeting was to conduct attacks on Shi'a and foreigners. Abu Gar asked Fajrun specifically to prepare an operation against foreigners in East Kalimantan.

After the meeting in Malang Abu Gar left for a visit to Nusakambangan to meet Aman Abdurrahman and Rois and report on the results of the Batu meeting. In the course of the conversation, Aman told Abu Gar that there had been an instruction from the ISIS government in Syria, conveyed by Abu Jandal through Telegram, to carry out an attack in Indonesia.<sup>23</sup> Aman told Abu Gar that Abu Jandal would be transferring funds for the operation, and he told Abu Gar to talk to Rois about the technical details.

In a subsequent conversation with Rois, Rois told Abu Gar that the instruction was for the operation to be carried out immediately, with the hope that the kind of attack undertaken in Paris could be repeated in Jakarta. Rois asked Abu Gar to lead the operation, but Abu Gar said he preferred to concentrate on the military training for JAKI members. He promised, however, to find experienced people who could do the job. Rois told him that he had two people who were ready to take part and gave Rois a Telegram contact. He also said the funds for operation and military training would be delivered without delay to Abu Gar.

A few days later, Abu Gar received a bank account number and an ATM card from a friend of Rois's. The account belonged to a woman in Yogyakarta who together with her husband had just arrived in Syria. The account was used to collect funds from Indonesia as well as from Syria; when Abu Gar was arrested, it had a balance of some Rp.350 million.

Abu Gar then went to see Muhammad Ali to discuss plans for an attack. His old associate agreed to lead the operation. Abu Gar then gave him the Telegram contacts from Rois, who turned out to be Sunakim alias Afif, a recently released prisoner, and a man named Ahmad Muhazan. Ali recommended bringing in Dian Juni Kurniadi as well. Dian was close to the directors of two pesantrens that were centers of pro-ISIS activity and housed many followers of Aman Abdurrahman: al-Anshorullah in Ciamis, run by Fauzan al-Anshori and Ibnu Masoed in Bogor, run by Ustadz Adib, now in Syria.

In December 2015 Abu Gar, assisted by Dian and Muhammad Ali, conducted two training courses in Malang and Cianjur for JAKI members. Each had about 20 participants. When the Cianjur training

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> In a February 2016 report, we wrote that Abu Jandal "is not thought to have played a role in the attacks. There are many unanswered questions, however, especially about the funding." This was before information surfaced about an instruction from Syria for an attack, but it remains the case that the details of the attack including targeting, timing and personnel, were left to the Indonesian cells to arrange. See IPAC, "Disunity among Indonesian ISIS Supporters and the Rise of More Violence", Report No. 25, 1 February 2016, p.1.

was over, Muhammad Ali asked for funds for the operation in Jakarta, and Abu Gar turned over Rp. 70 million from the Yogyakarta account.

Abu Gar returned to Ambon at the end of December with the goal of putting the JAKI organisation in Ambon in order. He was never informed about when the Jakarta operation would take place. On 14 January 2016 Muhammad Ali and his friends did their imitation of Paris in central Jakarta. The four attackers were killed, together with four civilians. Arrests by police began within hours of the attacks, and Abu Gar left Ambon the next day. He told his friends that his child was transferring to Pesantren Ibn Masoed and he needed to finalise arrangements. He left for Jakarta, then went on to Solo and stayed there for a few weeks. For a while he hid in the office of Azam Dakwah Center (ADC), a charity that collects funds online for families of prisoners and “martyrs” and that also serves as the JAKI headquarters in Central Java. From Solo he went on to Malang where he hid with Ustadz Romly, the JAKI amir for East Java, until his arrest on 19 February.

## VII. ISIS IN AMBON AFTER ABU GAR’S ARREST

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After Abu Gar’s arrest, the ISIS supporters in Ambon seemed rudderless. The only person among them who had any religious knowledge and organising skills was now in custody, and for the moment, they decided to lie low. The role of JAKI coordinator for Ambon was given to Said Laisouw alias Aco, the former cellmate of Abu Gar’s. Members decided to focus on religious instruction rather than jihadi actions. One of Abu Gar’s students, Jafar, was entrusted to replace him as discussion leader but without religious credentials, he does not command the same respect. The weekly *pengajian* at Mushola Nurul Izzah in Batu Merah continued to have about 20 hardliners but it is not clear what direction it would take.

The dynamics in Ambon could well change, as terrorist prisoners with the requisite religious knowledge are released and become available to help reorganise and remotivate pro-ISIS members who are now at loose ends. One possibility is Agus Sunyoto alias Gapek, released in March 2016 after serving four years for a series of extremist-linked robberies. A graduate of Darus Syhadah, he married a woman from Ceram; they now reportedly plan to move to Ambon.<sup>24</sup> Another possibility is Syarif Tarabuban, a former police officer and committed ISIS supporter formerly detained with Abu Gar in Porong prison.<sup>25</sup> He was moved to a prison in Pamekasan, Madura in September 2015 and is expected to be released around August this year.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

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Bonds forged in Ambon and Poso kept Abu Gar involved in jihad; helped find him refuge after the Cimanggis explosion; gave him a community after his release from prison; provided instructors for his followers in 2011; reinforced his pro-ISIS leanings; and helped him build the team for the Jakarta attacks.

The input provided by Aman Abdurrahman, who was not part of the Ambon-Poso circles, was critical to Abu Gar’s ideological development. But once he embarked on the *takfiri* path that led to ISIS, the Ambon links provided the necessary materials for building an extremist network.

It is also worth looking at those in Abu Gar’s circle who have left for Syria. Sholeh is the closest, and while we do not know if he and Abu Gar were in direct communication after he reached Syria, it would be odd if they were not. Faiz alias Abu Walid, the man sent to “neutralise” Abu Gar’s extremism in 2004, is now reportedly in a senior role in ISIS; he may have been radicalised by his long imprisonment in the Philippines. Several of the men who were in the Panda Jaya camps in Poso in 2001 are now in Syria. Living in Ambon, Abu Gar may have been of less interest to ISIS leaders than had he lived in Jakarta.

24 Gapek was originally from Tim Hisbah, a Solo-based anti-vice group that turned to terrorism in 2010. Several Tim Hisbah members were arrested in August and December 2015 for plotting terrorist attacks under the direction of Bahrun Naim, an Indonesian who has been with ISIS in Syria since early 2015. At least four Tim Hisbah members are known to be in Syria, but there may be more. Gapek’s wife is herself an alumna of another JI school, al-Muttaqien in Jepara.

25 Born on 5 February 1979 in Ambon, Syarif was arrested in November 2005 in West Ceram for involvement in a series of violent crimes in Ambon in 2004-2005. He was also involved in the 2003 murder in Ambon of a former Darul Islam Aceh member, Fauzi Hasbi and two others.

But it is a reminder that anyone who served in Ambon and Poso and retains extremist inclinations may be only a phone call or a Telegram message away from an old friend in Syria who can convey an order or instruction.

In terms of interventions, better supervision in prison might have prevented the recruitment of ordinary criminals and the further radicalisation of some (not all) of the Ambon inmates. Once it became clear to prison staff that he was holding religious study sessions, he probably should have been stopped; the extremists among the Ambon group should also probably have been split up among different prisons. This would have required staff with the skills to understand what was going on, however, and the ability to do regular evaluations over time of the activities of high-risk inmates.

Information on Abu Gar's imminent release in 2011 was not conveyed to all the agencies that needed to know, but even if it had been, it is not clear that there would have been the resources to put an adequate monitoring program in place. Once Joko Jihad was arrested and implicated him in the bomb instruction program, however, Abu Gar probably should have been immediately rearrested – and if he had been prosecuted and convicted, he would have been out of circulation just as interest in Syria was rising. With Indonesian judges' tendency to interpret law very conservatively, however, it would have been difficult to get a conviction on terrorism charges if Abu Gar was not directly involved in the teaching. The government's draft of an amended anti-terrorism law now in under discussion in the Indonesian parliament could make it easier, but it is not clear what the final form of the law will look like.

Abu Gar is a good example of a hardline ideologue, and it is difficult to imagine anyone persuading him to change. But at various points his influence was limited by the appearance of rival ideologues with the seniority, credibility or religious credentials to win more followers. This was true when the senior JI prisoners arrived in Porong; when Qasim began to challenge him; and when Jumu began his anti-ISIS campaign. Encouraging these debates is probably a useful strategy, but fighting one form of extremism with another also has its costs.

The case of Mas Tomo in this report shows how the impact of information directly from Syria served to dampen enthusiasm for going there. Many involved in extremist social media networks remain convinced that negative news from Syria and Iraq is all Western propaganda. Getting convincing information into the public domain – on nightly television news broadcasts, for example – and into extremist chats would be useful. (There is no guarantee that it would have a deterrent effect, but a few experiments would be worthwhile.)

Finally, it is worth noting how little mention there is these few pages about women, because we simply do not have the information. We know the name of Abu Gar's wife but not her connections, except that one of the Jakarta attackers was Abu Gar's brother-in-law. Understanding the connections among the men is only half the picture. More mapping of ties among extremist women might generate more ideas for effective interventions.

## INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT (IPAC)

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