

COVID-19 AND THE MUJAHIDIN OF EASTERN INDONESIA (MIT)

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I. INTRODUCTION

The renewal of violence in Poso, Central Sulawesi in March and April 2020 is the direct result of local extremists seeing Covid-19 as an ally in the war against Islam's enemies. The arrival of the virus gave the Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia (Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, MIT) a new hope that victory was near, and buoyed by the addition of new recruits, it began a series of attacks.

The violence was made possible by MIT's recovery after joint military-police operations in 2016 led to the killing of its then leader, Santoso and the decimation of his already small band. Under the leadership of Ali Kalora, MIT embarked on a recruitment program that brought it up to about 20 combatants and a few guns but with crucial support in some communities.

Those few fighters have managed to hold off thousands of police and military for more than four years. At its height in 2016, Operation Tinombala involved some 2,400 troops, including some of Indonesia's most elite military and paramilitary units. As of late 2019, combined police-military strength in Poso was believed to be about 600.¹

MIT's rebirth suggests that a much-heralded deradicalisation program, led by police in Poso and aimed at convincing former MIT members to disassociate themselves from extremism, had limited impact beyond the individuals themselves. The program successfully turned several former prisoners away from extremism but did not stop recruitment, did not weaken pockets of local support for MIT and did not stop a few communities that had long been involved in conflict from seeing police as the enemy. A "re-radicalisation" campaign by a pro-ISIS cleric may have had as much influence as the police program.

This short briefing explains how MIT recovered, why it saw the emergence of COVID-19 as a chance to attack its enemies and what the future of MIT could be in Poso. The immediate concern is the possibility of new attacks during Ramadan but there is a longer-term threat as well. MIT has shown a capacity for regeneration that suggests the need for more work in vulnerable communities.

II. MIT AFTER SANTOSO

By late 2016, MIT was at its lowest point, nearly finished as an organisation. Santoso had been killed in July by an elite army patrol. His wife and two other women combatants were in custody. Basri, a legendary fugitive since his escape from prison in 2013, had been recaptured in September 2016. Between deaths and arrests, some 40 fighters and couriers had been taken out of action. MIT was down to nine men, and supplies were scarce.² Recruitment was at a standstill.³ Police and soldiers were everywhere, infiltration of the community was high and the police deradicalisation program had led some former members to suggest that the costs of violence outweighed the benefits.

¹ Operation Tinombala was directly ordered by President Jokowi and was aimed at capturing Santoso. Initially mandated for two months, it was repeatedly renewed, even after Santoso was killed in July 2016, though with some troop reduction. By 4 October 2019, when it was extended through 31 December 2019, it was down to 600 joint forces. It was last renewed in January 2020 for six months, with police refusing to say how many security forces were involved. See "Masa Tugas Satgas Tinombala Diperpanjang 6 Bulan ke Depan", *liputan6.com*, 31 December 2019. For more on immediate antecedents of Operation Tinombala in Poso, see IPAC, "Update on the Indonesian Military's Influence," Report No.26, 11 March 2016, pp.3-5

² In August 2016, police arrested Djono Priadi, an employee of the local office of Public Works in Palu, who had helped MIT with supplies.

³ MIT's recruitment and supply chain was disrupted by arrests in connection with the January 2016 attack in central Jakarta. Hendro Fernando, who had helped channel funds from ISIS in Syria to Poso was arrested in the aftermath as was Ali Hamka, the head of JAD Indramayu who had been active in sending recruits to Poso, including his own son. Ali Hamka was released in January 2020, while his son Musa Al Qosam was released in March 2020. Both returned to Indramayu, West Java.

It was under these conditions that Ishak Ipa alias Ali Kalora took over as leader. Very little is known about the man, other than that he was born in Buru, central Maluku in 1980 – not in the village of Kalora, Poso as many media accounts have suggested. Few believed he would last long.

MIT's situation, already dire, deteriorated even further in 2017 after two of its most experienced fighters, Barok alias Firdaus and Askar alias Jaid, both from Bima, Sumbawa were killed in a shoot-out with security forces on 15 May 2017 in Poso Pesisir.⁴ MIT lost not only the men but their firearms, leaving a total of seven men with two rifles and two revolvers. At this point, Ali Kalora moved the group north, from its traditional stronghold in the hills around Gunung Biru, Poso Pesisir, to Parigi Moutong, the next district over.

The excitement of the ISIS takeover of Marawi in the southern Philippines in May 2017 pushed Poso even more to the sidelines. Supporters of Islamic State in Indonesia seemed to forget about it entirely. Jamaah Anshorud Daulah (JAD), Indonesia's largest pro-ISIS coalition that had channelled thousands of dollars from Syria to MIT, was now transferring funds to Marawi instead. A group from JAD-Bima, that a year earlier would have gone to Poso, left for the Philippines, only to be deported on arrival, although not arrested on their return to Indonesia.⁵

There were still MIT supporters in Poso but most were otherwise occupied. One of the most important was Ustadz Yasin, a former Jemaah Islamiyah leader from Semarang, Central Java who had played a major role in supporting MIT in its early years. ("Ustadz" is an honorific meaning "teacher".) Arrested in 2012, he was released in November 2016 after serving a four-year sentence and immediately went back to Poso. But he was more focused on turning his pesantren, Darul Anshar in Kayamanya, Poso, into a centre for pro-ISIS activities and a place of shelter and support for the children of imprisoned MIT fighters.

III. STRENGTHENING THE BASE

Despite seeming insurmountable obstacles, Ali Kalora managed to bring MIT back to life in 2018. By the end of the year, it was back up to sixteen fighters, thanks first to the end of the Marawi siege in October 2017 and then to the Palu earthquake and tsunami in September 2018.

A. New Efforts at Recruitment

Euphoria among local ISIS supporters over Marawi gave way to disappointment after defeats both there and in Syria, but Ali Kalora saw this as an opportunity to turn attention back to his own little long-running insurgency. He tried getting reinforcements from Bima first but failed, in part because police had arrested 13 JAD members, including former prisoner Baharudin Amin, for an attack on the Bima police command on 11 September 2017.

At the end of 2017, he contacted two pro-ISIS prisoners serving life sentences in Madiun, East Java: Abdullah Umamity from Ambon, and Agung Hamid, from Makassar.⁶ He asked their help in recruiting new fighters and both agreed – indicating the importance of ongoing links between *mujahidin* inside the prison system and those outside. Abdullah got in touch with a former cellmate, Said Laisouw, who had been released from prison in 2011 and had become the *amir* of JAD-Ambon. Agung Hamid likewise

⁴ “Baku Tembak di Poso, Barok dan Askar Tewas,” sultengraya.com, 17 May 2017.

⁵ They included two men named Jasman and Sukrin who were involved in a shootout with police in April 2018. IPAC phone interview with Indonesian official in Jakarta, 17 April 2020.

⁶ Abdullah Umamity was involved in a 2005 attack on a Brimob post in Loki, West Ceram, Maluku in which five police and their cook were killed. He also took part in several other attacks. Agung Hamid, who led the December 2002 Makassar bombings, continued to maintain close contact with fellow extremists in South Sulawesi after his arrest, as did his wife, who was a regular visitor. Agung had been a member of Laskar Jundullah and Wahdah Islamiyah and had fought in Poso at the height of the communal conflict there.

contacted a former prisoner who had worked with him on the 2002 Makassar bombings, Muhammad Itang. Said and Itang together sent six men to Poso.

Ali Kalora chose of his closest associates, Khairul Amin alias Irul from Kalora, Poso, who had married one of Santoso's daughters, to facilitate local recruitment. He also asked his younger sister, Linda Ipa, to act as treasurer and receive any funds from outside that were channelled to MIT. But he still believed the group was too weak to carry out attacks, especially after it lost two of the new Ambon recruits in April 2018 when they were arrested trying to get supplies.⁷

The uprising in early May 2018 at the Brimob detention centre, which served as a remand centre for captured terrorist suspects, provided the first occasion for many Indonesians to see Ali Kalora. He released a four-minute video that was widely circulated on social media and played on major Indonesian television programs urging inmates not to surrender. He said MIT should serve as an example – it never gave up, even though it had only two guns:

You have lots of *ghonimah* (war booty, in this case arms) and bullets. Fight them! Strike them! Use the sword, my brothers, hit their faces until they're smashed. That's what a sword entitles you to, don't even think about surrender.⁸

The prisoners eventually surrendered anyway, out of hunger. A week later, on 13 May 2018, came the Surabaya bombings where three JAD families, including young children, blew themselves up attacking churches and trying to hit a police station.⁹ The two incidents triggered the adoption by the Indonesian parliament of a strengthened anti-terrorism law that gave enhanced powers to the police to conduct "preemptive strikes", leading to hundreds of new arrests – including in the places that MIT had relied on for recruitment. In Ambon, police rounded up eight JAD members, including a cousin of Ali Kalora's, and in South Sulawesi, they arrested ten linked to Darul Islam-Makassar, including former prisoner Anton Labase, who had been involved with Agung Hamid in the Makassar bombings and who had also fought in Poso at the height of the communal conflict.¹⁰

In Poso itself, Ustadz Yasin forbade his students to have any contact with Ali Kalora because he knew that with the new law, it would be easy to arrest them. He focused instead on raising funds for the families of arrested MIT members. His "re-radicalisation" program was also underway (see below).¹¹

A humanitarian disaster brought new opportunities for MIT, which by this time was down to seven men. On 28 September 2018 a devastating earthquake and tsunami in and around Palu, capital of South Sulawesi, killed over 4,300 people, though the true toll will never be known.¹² While security forces were busy with disaster relief, MIT resumed its recruiting efforts, bringing in young men who evaded scrutiny by pretending to be humanitarian volunteers. Through the old Ring Banten network, MIT got three new fighters, led by Al Qindi Mutaqien alias Muaz, nephew of executed Bali bomber Imam Samudra, and two

⁷ "Dua Pria Asal Ambon Anggota MIT ditangkap Babansa di Poso", *KabarSelebes.id*, 30 April 2018.

⁸ "Penampakan TERORIS ALI KALORA pengganti SANTOSO pasca Teror Mako Brimob & Bom Surabaya, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IY-3ypUVDCI>, 30 January 2020.

⁹ See IPAC, "The Surabaya Bombings and the Future of ISIS in Indonesia," IPAC Report No.51, 18 October 2018.

¹⁰ Indonesian Supreme Court decision No.454/Pid.Sus/2019/PNJkt.Utara in the case of Jamaluddin alias Muhammad Idris.

<https://putusan3.mahkamahagung.go.id/direktori/putusan/8ab445f32d95c0faec11f53a020f3b71.html>

¹¹ IPAC phone interview with Indonesian official, 15 April 2020.

¹² "Central Sulawesi disasters killed 4,340, final count reveals," *Jakarta Post*, 30 January 2019.

of his friends.¹³ Irul, the local recruiter, decided to join them in the hills. Thanks to the new arrivals, MIT was back up to eighteen men by the end of 2018, and Ali Kalora was ready to take action.

On 30 December 2018 an artisanal gold miner originally from Toraja, South Sulawesi was abducted and beheaded in Salubanga village, Sausu subdistrict, Parigi Moutong.¹⁴ The perpetrators then shot and wounded two police who came to remove the body.¹⁵ The operation proved costly for MIT. Police intensified their search for MIT members and on 11 January 2019, they arrested Linda Ipa, Ali Kalora's sister and basic goods supplier. Over the next few months, MIT lost five more men. In early March, Ba'asyir alias Romzi from Bima was shot and killed and Aditya, from Ambon, was arrested. Then on 21 March, Al Qindi Mutaqin was one of three killed in a clash with police.¹⁶

B. Ustadz Yasin's Network

Ali Kalora decided that despite the losses, he would stay in Parigi Mountong. He had to both guard against informants and step up recruiting. On 25 June 2019, two farmers, a father and son, were found slain with their throats cut in Parigi Selatan subdistrict, apparently as a warning to others that they should not provide any information to the police.¹⁷ As for recruitment, the new terrorism law made it increasingly difficult to bring people in from outside. He would have to look closer to home and decided to focus on the students of Ustadz Yasin. He got help in this endeavour from Muis Fahron also known as Abdullah or Bang Dul, a senior student from Kayamanya who managed to recruit fourteen fellow members of Ustadz Yasin's religious study group (*pengajian*). One was Wahyudin, Yasin's son-in-law. Two others were former prisoners, Imron alias Genda and Darwin Gobel alias Ali, a young man arrested as a minor in 2017 and released in late 2018.¹⁸

Abdullah also looked for others who were part of Yasin's extensive network. Since his release, Yasin had managed to expand his contacts through his fund-raising on behalf of extremist prisoners from Sulawesi and their families. Abdullah was thus able to recruit four ISIS supporters in Kasimbar, Parigi Mountong. With the help of a woman named Murniati, he also found several men willing to join in Siwa, Kabupaten Muna, Southeast Sulawesi. Murniati herself was the ex-wife of Arman Galaxi, a former prisoner involved in the 2002 Makassar bombings who had joined ISIS in Syria. She had wanted to go to Syria too but was stopped from leaving Surabaya airport in May 2015.¹⁹ With her help, Abdullah succeeded in finding five new fighters, including Murniati's new husband and her own son; his own decision to join made six. Several others who had wanted to join were arrested before they could do so, but the addition of these men was a major boost for MIT. By February 2020, MIT was back up to 20 fighters. Even with two of the twenty pulling out and turning themselves into the police in March,

¹³ They were Al Qindi himself, Alvin alias Adam and Jaka Ramadhan alias Ikrim. "Kaleidoskop 2019: Sepak Terjang Kelompok MIT Poso", kumparan.com, 31 December 2019.

¹⁴ "Polri Dalami Dugaan Pembunuhan 2 Warga oleh Kelompok Ali Kalora," tirta.id, 26 June 2019.

¹⁵ "Dua Polisi Jadi Korban Penembakan DPO MIT Poso," tempo.co, 31 December 2018.

¹⁶ Also killed were Andi Muhammad alias Abdullah alias Abdurrahman Al Makasari from Makassar and Alhaji Kaliki alias Ibrohim from Ambon. "Densus 88 Tembak Mati Keponakan Imam Samudra di Sulteng," solopos.com, 5 April 2019.

¹⁷ "Dua Petani di Parigi Moutong Ayah dan Anak Ditemukan Tewas Digorok di Kebun," palu.tribunnews.com, 25 June 2019.

¹⁸ It was Darwin Gobel's second arrest, but the first time, in 2016, he was given "guidance" but was never tried. He was then arrested in March 2017 and sentenced to two years in October 2017. He seems to have been released sometime after September 2018 because he still appears on an official list of prisoners from that date. "Polisi: Ali Pernah Dipenjara 2 Tahun," media.alkhairaat.id, 15 April 2020.

¹⁹ "Baru Pertama Kali Ke Luar Negeri, Riduansyah Dicekal," tribunnews.com, 15 May 2015. This article gives the passport numbers of all those stopped.

the reinforcements were enough to lead Ali Kalora to conclude that it was time to move back to Poso Pesisir.²⁰

IV. JOINING FORCES WITH CORONA

The arrival of Covid-19 in Indonesia instilled a new optimism in MIT. Ali Kalora and his fighters believed that the virus was the army of Allah that had been sent down to destroy the enemies of Islamic State.²¹ They saw that not only was it infecting and killing kafirs (non-believers) but it was also weakening the economies of all the states engaged in the war against ISIS, including America, Britain, Australia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran – and Indonesia. This belief was enough to convince the tiny group of combatants that they could eventually defeat the Indonesian state.

One cleric whose pronouncements on Covid-19 became a reference for ISIS supporters was Ihsan Tanjung, a specialist on the end of time whose lectures are widely available on YouTube. Ihsan has never overtly supported ISIS and he reaches an audience that goes far beyond extremists, but his focus for years on Syria as the place where the Imam Mahdi would appear at Islam's final battle made him hugely popular in pro-ISIS circles. He takes current phenomena, such as the explosion of the Anak Krakatau volcano off the coast of West Java on 11-12 April 2020 and notes how these are indications of the imminent arrival – maybe even during Ramadan 2020 – of the great hot cloud called *dukhon* that will envelope the earth for 40 days as the apocalypse nears. There are only three ways to seek safety from the *dukhon*, according to Ust. Ihsan. One is to flee (hijrah) to Mecca in Saudi Arabia and join forces with the Imam Mahdi there, but since Saudi Arabia is now under a Covid-19 lockdown, this is not an option. The second is to resign oneself to accepting death. The third is to emigrate to a hilly area that will provide safety. ISIS supporters have discussed possible sites, one of which Poso – and going to the hills means joining MIT.²²

MIT supporters began to see Covid-19 as an important ally in defeating their enemies. Ali Kalora told his followers on a widely circulated video:

Truly victory is near. The oppressor will fall because of corona and this war. God willing, it will happen soon.²³

The combination of this new optimism and the additional fighters gave MIT the confidence to resume its terrorism activities. On 27 March 2020 Ali Kalora attacked a group of Brimob police on motorcycles as they were transporting food supplies in Kilo village, Poso Pesisir Utara.²⁴ No one was killed, but the police were forced to flee and left behind their motorcycles and the food. The success of this operation raised MIT morale further. On 8 April 2020, some MIT members abducted a farmer named Daeng Topo, suspected of being an informant, then beheaded him, and Ali Kalora warned via video that other informants would suffer the same fate.²⁵

²⁰ “Tak tahan diburu, 2 Anggota MIT Pimpinan Ali Kalora Menyerahkan diri, palu,tribunnews.com, 21 March 2020.

²¹ The conviction that Corona was the army of Allah was not exclusive to MIT but became widely shared among ISIS supporters – who originally saw the virus as divine retribution against China for its treatment of the Uighurs. IPAC, “Covid-19 and ISIS in Indonesia,” Short Briefing No.1, 2 April 2020 and Nur Axiemah Azman, “‘Divine Retribution’: The Islamic State’s COVID-19 Propaganda,” *The Diplomat*, 24 March 2020.

²² Message from Ihsan Tanjung, 7:57 minutes in duration, circulated over social media on 11 April 2020.

²³ “Ngeri, Video Ali Kalora Mutilasi Petani di Hutan Poso Bicara Latar Bendera ISIS,” metrosulteng.com, 20 April 2020.

²⁴ Police report entitled “Penyenggangan terhadap personil brimob dan pembakaran 4 unit KR2 (Kendaraan2 red) (2 milik Brimob dan 2 milik warga)”, Poso, 28 Maret 2020.

²⁵ Ibid.

Then on 10 April, police killed a 20-year-old youth named Qidam Alfarizki Mowance whom they mistook for a terrorist. He had gone out of his house at 9 in the morning and somewhere near the police station in Poso Pesisir Utara, he was shot. Police said he was an MIT supporter who resisted arrest and so they were forced to shoot him, but this is such a common refrain that it has little credibility. His family were horrified when they saw the condition of the body when it was returned, with marks that they said suggested torture.²⁶ The incident was a major setback to efforts to improve community relations and police compounded the problem by refusing to provide any clarification on the incident or admit responsibility.²⁷

A week later, on 15 April, Abdullah and Darwin Gobel, the young ex-offender, raised the stakes by moving into the city of Poso. The two took a motorcycle to a Bank Syariah Mandiri branch, shot a policeman who was standing guard, and tried to seize his gun. They managed to wound him but before they could get the gun, other police arrived to help and the two sped off. Police were able to stop them in Maengko, Poso Kota and shot and killed them both.

In the two deaths, MIT lost its top recruiter and one of its most committed fighters. The loss was felt not only among fellow fighters but in the wider community. When Abdullah and Darwin were buried in Kayamanya, hundreds turned out to salute them as heroes, some displaying ISIS flags. It underscored how much the neighborhood of Kayamanya continues to be an extremist stronghold and the centre of pro-ISIS sentiment – thanks in part to the activities of Yasin and his pesantren.

The support shown for MIT during the funeral may have inspired Ali Kalora to undertake one more attack. On 19 April, MIT fighters kidnapped and killed a farmer in Kilo village, Poso Pesisir Utara named Ajeng alias Papa Angga. This was the fourth act of terrorism that MIT had carried out in the time of Covid-19.²⁸ On 25 April, a police team assigned to the Tinombala operation shot and killed another MIT member, Rajif Gandhi Sabban alias Rajes, from Ambon in the same village. He was later buried in Palu.²⁹

Ali Kalora and his friends remained in the hills of Poso Pesisir Utara as of the beginning of Ramadan. It is not clear whether they will try to strike again during the fasting month or flee from Tinombala operations while trying to rebuild their strength through new recruitment. If they mount another attack, it will be evidence that their confidence in Covid-19 as an ally remains high and they are genuinely convinced that victory is imminent. If they retreat, it will be an indication that they understand that their resources are insufficient to wage war against almost anyone, with a total force of fourteen fighters, one rifle, two homemade guns and a few bombs. This calculation could change if the pandemic brings unrest – or a jailbreak – to Poso.

Ali Kalora documented MIT's actions, from the attack on the police supply convoy to the beheadings of the farmers, and uploaded the videos to pro-ISIS social media groups. He appeared to be aiming at two audiences: first, the police, to sow fear that they would face more attacks, and second to ISIS followers in Indonesia, to encourage them to follow suit and mount attacks of their own. It is worth noting, however, that despite his dissemination of these videos, outreach through social media was not nearly as important a part of his strategy as it had been for Santoso. He has made little effort to seek international publicity, focusing more on building up the group's strength.

²⁶ “Kondisi Fisik Jenazah Tak Wajar, Polisi Tudung Qidam Alfarizki Teroris”, Suaramerdeka.id, 13 April 2020.

²⁷ “Ayah Qidam: Anak Saya Bukan Teroris, Dia Dibunuh Polisi,” portalsulawesi.com, 12 April 2020.

²⁸ “Petani Poso Tewas di Pegunungan Diduga Korban Penculikan Kelompok Teroris,” liputan6.com, 21 April 2020.

²⁹ “Berasal dari Ambon, Teroris Poso Dimakamkan di Palu,” beritasatu.com, 27 April 2020.

V. DERADICALISATION AND “RE-RADICALISATION”

In 2016 and 2017, police in Poso were winning recognition for their success in encouraging MIT prisoners to disengage from violence, either while they were still in prison or after their release.³⁰ The program was started in 2016 by the then Poso police chief and continued by his successor. It was never very big or well-funded but by focusing on outreach to families combined with in-kind assistance to released prisoners who want to start new jobs, it succeeded in bringing about a dozen prisoners out of pro-MIT networks.³¹ It turned out, however, that a counter-effort was going on at the same time led by Ustadz Yasin after his November 2016 release.

Since the early 2000s, prisoners linked to terrorism in and around Poso have constituted a major cluster of convicted terrorists. As of April 2020, the number imprisoned for activities linked to MIT – and this includes people from Maluku, West Nusa Tenggara and Java as well as Sulawesi – was about 90, though the total was constantly changing as releases and new arrests took place. Some 24 were released or due for release in 2020, with at least eight (and likely more) scheduled for release in 2021. Again as of April 2020, almost two dozen of the Poso-linked prisoners were in super-maximum security prisons with single cells and tight restrictions on communications and visitors.³²

Some ISIS supporters, including Ustadz Yasin, foresaw that there would be an effort at deradicalisation of prisoners and decided to pre-empt it, but if it were going to compete with the police program, it needed funding. Yasin was already raising money for two broad goals – assistance for his pesantren, Darul Anshar in Kayamanya, Poso (with a smaller branch of the same name in Morowali), and aid to the families of detained and recently released “muhahidin” and their families. He not only provided monthly payments to families but also offered free schooling for their children at the Kayamanya pesantren.

The police program only reached prisoners detained in local prisons. Ustadz Yasin went further, traveling around to prisons in Java and elsewhere where Poso-linked prisoners were held, visiting the prisoners and giving them renewed commitment to stand firm. One example was Imron alias Genda, arrested in 2015 for supplying Santoso. Shortly after his conviction he was moved to Boalemo Prison in Gorontalo. There he was very cooperative, and he requested to be moved to Palu to be closer to his family. The Corrections Directorate in the Ministry of Law and Human Rights approved the move. Then someone from the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme, BNPT) arrived, wanting more detainees for BNPT’s controversial “deradicalisation centre” in Sentul, Bogor.³³ Without consulting authorities at Boalemo Prison, BNPT moved Genda to Sentul. Genda felt cheated. He had been promised that he would be nearer his family and he was now further away than ever. In protest, he refused to take part in any of the Sentul programs. BNPT then branded him as uncooperative and sent him back, not to Boalemo but Pasir Putih, the super-maximum security prison on Nusakambangan island used for men considered most dangerous and hardcore. This made Genda angrier and more uncooperative than ever. Meanwhile, Ustadz Yasin was visiting Genda’s family and offered

³⁰ IPAC, “Recent and Planned Releases of Indonesian Extremists: An Update,” Report No.49, 10 August 2018, p.5.

³¹ One of the most active of the police officers involved was AKBP Bogiek Sugiyarto. He was first assigned to the central Sulawesi provincial police in 2009 and went on to serve as deputy police chief of Morowali, deputy chief of Poso and beginning January 2017 as chief (kapolres Poso). He was transferred to Mojokerto Java on 2 September 2019.

³² This included sixteen prisoners in Pasir Putih, five in Gunung Sindur and one (Saiful Anam alias Brekele) in Karanganyar Prison.

³³ This centre was supposed to be for rehabilitated terrorism offenders who were soon to be released, men who were deemed to be model prisoners, but the prison was so isolated and inmates were reportedly so unhappy that a few reverted to their hardline stance. See IPAC, “Recent and Planned Releases of Indonesian Extremists: An Update”, Report No.49, 10 August 2018, p.4.

scholarships for his children to attend Darul Anshar pesantren. When Genda was released in January 2019, he was still angry about his treatment and refused to have anything to do with BNPT. Instead, he returned to the network that had shown sympathy towards his family and eventually became a courier for MIT, delivering explosives to Ali Kalora. He was re-arrested at the end of 2019.

Genda's experience (and there are other similar accounts) suggests that an independent evaluation is needed of both Sentul as an institution and BNPT as an actor in the rehabilitation of prisoners, with a view toward constructive changes that would make both more effective. It also illustrates how one misstep – in this case, the failure to carry through with the promise to move Genda nearer his family – can have disastrous results.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED AND THE FUTURE OF MIT

Quite apart from the question of whether MIT could mount an attack during Ramadan, the Indonesian government needs to understand MIT's staying power. Not only did Santoso's death in 2016 not discourage the remaining members, but his successor quickly found new sources of supplies, community support and recruits. Not enough, clearly, to turn MIT into a major fighting force but enough to ensure its survival and regeneration. Many government counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism forces have found to their chagrin that decapitating an organisation is rarely enough to prevent its resurgence if underlying issues are left to fester – especially grievances related to the security forces. The turnout at the burial of Abdullah and Darwin should serve as a warning that Poso remains not just a possible but a likely centre of recruitment for violent extremists.

Indeed, even if government forces were able to cut off supplies of people and goods, leaving MIT fighters besieged until all were dead or captured, the contextual factors that gave rise to MIT in the first place almost guarantee that another organisation will rise in its place. Poso has been hugely symbolic to the violent extremist movement as it has moved from communal violence to locally-inspired terrorism to a stronghold of ISIS support. It is the only place in Indonesia where extremists could ever plausibly claim to control territory, even if only a jungle camp or two, and maintain an active jihad. Covid-19 has inspired the fighters to a new round of violence, but they were never completely dormant.

Indonesian authorities also need to understand why Yasin's "re-radicalisation" worked – among other things, it built on the failures of "deradicalisation", of which the Sentul facility is a prime example. The local police effort at rehabilitating prisoners was a good one, but it needed more resources and a staff that would survive the transfer of senior officers. It also needed to be able to reach as far as Yasin did, into the prisons outside central Sulawesi where the most disgruntled prisoners were held. It is not clear how Yasin has avoided re-arrest under the 2018 anti-terrorism law, but his fund-raising activities underscore the thin line between charitable giving and terrorist financing.

MIT built its recruitment efforts around ex-prisoners and those currently detained – and there was good communication between the two. This means that more resources are urgently needed for post-release monitoring in areas that are particularly vulnerable to recruitment – and that includes not only neighbourhoods like Kayamanya in Poso, but also the former Darul Islam strongholds of Banten and Makassar as well as Ambon and Bima. Ideally, local police would be able to work with community leaders to identify mentors who could assist released prisoners and their families over the longer term. Realistically, financial and human resources were too limited even before Covid-19 struck for this to happen in any systematic way. Now with communities more concerned about crime, especially after

a wave of releases of criminal offenders designed to address overcrowding in virus-prone prisons, the likelihood of any creative new programs aimed at rehabilitation of ex-terrorist prisoners is very low indeed.³⁴

In the end, however much Covid-19 creates a new context for extremist action, the key factors in addressing violent extremism remain the same: better post-release monitoring, more targeted reintegration programs, and more systematic work with communities, including schools.

³⁴ For one example of local concern, see “Kriminalitas Setelah Pembebasan Napi, Kegagalan Memberi Rasa Aman,” mediasulsel.com, 21 April 2020.