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The Growth of ISIS Extremism in Southeast Asia: Its Ideological and Cognitive Features—and Possible Policy Responses

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The Growth of ISIS Extremism in Southeast Asia: Its Ideological and Cognitive Features—and Possible Policy Responses

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This article examines the radicalization of young Southeast Asians into the violent extremism that characterizes the notorious Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). After situating ISIS within its wider and older Al Qaeda Islamist ideological milieu, the article sketches out the historical landscape of violent Islamist extremism in Southeast Asia. There it focuses on the Al Qaeda-affiliated, Indonesian-based but transnational Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) network, revealing how the emergence of ISIS has impacted JI's evolutionary trajectory. The article surveys major explanations of how radicalization into violent extremism (RIVE) occurs, setting the stage for the ensuing discussion of two features of RIVE in Southeast Asia: violent Islamism and extremism. It shows that for sound policy reasons "radicals" and "extremists" should be viewed as analytically distinct and argues that extremism itself, not just violent extremism, is a problem that should be addressed in Southeast Asia and beyond. It asserts that there is no such thing as "nonviolent" extremism and suggests that "not-yet violent" extremism is a more accurate term. The article concludes by discussing operational and strategic policy options.

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In May 2015, Singaporean prime minister Lee Hsien Loong revealed at a high-level international security conference in Singapore that a month earlier, a nineteen-year-old Singaporean who had been detained for planning to join the notorious Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had intended to assassinate the prime minister and the country's president. Because the young man, who had been radicalized online by violent Islamist propaganda, could not leave for Syria to join ISIS, he had made plans to assassinate the two Singaporean political leaders and go on to kill ordinary citizens in public places.[1] While self-radicalized Singaporeans were not a new phenomenon, this young man was the first who had planned to carry out terrorist attacks within the country rather than joining a militant group overseas.[2] The dramatic announcement by the prime minister underscored how serious a threat ISIS had become not just in Singapore but in the wider Southeast Asian region. In less than a year, ISIS had all but eclipsed Al Qaeda and its affiliated Southeast Asian militant networks, such as the Indonesian-based transnational Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), as the key transnational terrorist threat to the region. Heightening regional concerns was the fact that ISIS, as Prime Minister Lee also said during his speech in May, appeared keen to fish in troubled Southeast Asian waters for moral and manpower support. On June 29, 2014, the ISIS leader Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi proclaimed a worldwide Islamic state or caliphate with himself as the leader or caliph. Southeast Asia—home to approximately 240 million Muslims, or about 42 percent of the Southeast Asian population and 25 percent of the estimated global Muslim population of 1.6 billion—seems to be in his sights.[3] ISIS seeks to turn the region into a *wilayat* or province of its caliphate, and to this end has started a Malay-speaking unit in its ranks called Katibah

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Nusantara or the Malay Archipelago Unit (Majmuah Al Arkhabiliy in Arabic), including by some estimates, more than 700 Indonesians and 200 Malaysians. The fear in Southeast Asian official circles is that, as in the 1980s when Southeast Asian Muslim militants, radicalized by the pan-Muslim conflict in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation forces, returned to the region and soon evolved into the violent Al Qaeda affiliate JI, a new, equally violent and more dangerously social media–savvy generation of Southeast Asians will return to turn Baghdadi's vision of a Southeast Asian *wilayat* into a brutal reality.[4] Such fears appear to be warranted. There are signs now that such a *wilayat* may be close to being declared in Mindanao in the southern Philippines.[5]

This article examines the radicalization of young Southeast Asians, such as the young Singaporean cited by Prime Minister Lee, into violent extremism of the ISIS variety. Numerous scholars have attempted to explain the process of radicalization into violent extremism (RIVE). But the issue is complex. This article, therefore, attempts only to tease out the ideological and cognitive features of RIVE that appear pertinent in Southeast Asia. In the first of six sections, it creates an analytical framework by situating ISIS within its wider and older Al Qaeda Islamist ideological milieu. The article then sketches out the historical landscape of violent Islamist extremism in Southeast Asia, focusing on the JI network and showing how the emergence of ISIS has impacted JI's evolutionary trajectory. The third section surveys some important explanations of how RIVE occurs, to set the stage for the discussion of the ideological and cognitive features of RIVE in Southeast Asia. The fourth section sketches out the evolution of two features of RIVE in Southeast Asia: violent Islamism and extremism. Violent Islamism is the basic ideological template for the virulent extremism of ISIS that seems so appealing to many young people in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. The discussion of extremism distinguishes between "radicals" and "extremists": while one may debate and even negotiate with radicals, it may be less possible to do so with extremists. This distinction must be made, it is shown, for sound policy reasons.

The fifth section explains why extremism itself, not just violent extremism, must be addressed in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the world. It argues that there is no such thing as "non-violent" extremism and suggests that "not-yet violent" extremism is a more accurate term. The final section outlines an operational and a strategic policy option for coping with the ISIS extremist threat: isolating the possible attitudinal and behavioral indicators that the "violent potentials" within not-yet-violent extremists are about to be consummated and acknowledging that countering extremism is the key strategic task.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria: One "Mutation" of the Evolving Al Qaeda Global Movement

ISIS is not a new phenomenon. It is simply the latest "mutation" of the wider Al Qaeda ideological movement in the face of intense global security force pressure since the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.[6] As Bruce Hoffman points out, the current configuration of the global Al Qaeda movement comprises "four distinct, but not mutually exclusive, dimensions" in "descending order of sophistication": "Al-Qaeda Central," "Al-Qaeda Affiliates and Associates," "Al-Qaeda Network," and "Al-Qaeda Galaxy."[7] "Al-Qaeda Central" comprises the "remnants of the pre 9/11 al-Qaeda organization." "Al-Qaeda Affiliates and Associates" includes regional franchise networks, such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, JI in Southeast Asia, Al-Nusra in Syria,[8] and ISIS, which straddles Iraq and Syria and has since mid-2014 rapidly grown into a global rival to Al Qaeda proper, chiefly because of its highly symbolic and strategic inauguration of the caliphate. Scott Atran has argued that the caliphate idea "represents a very real and powerful attractor for the disaffected across the Muslim world." He describes it as a

"systemic, countercultural global movement" that "represents in the minds of tens of millions a history and destiny denied."[9] "Al-Qaeda Network" comprises "amorphous groups of al-Qaeda adherents who are likely to have had some prior terrorism experience" and connection with "Al-Qaeda Central," such as the so-called 7/7 bombers who struck the London rail and bus network in July 2005. The leader of the four-man militant cell that carried out the London attacks that killed fifty-two civilians, Mohammad Siddique Khan, and one other cell member had received paramilitary training by "Al-Qaeda Central" in Pakistan prior to the attacks.[10] The group Hoffman calls "Al-Qaeda Galaxy" comprises "home-grown Islamic radicals who have no direct connection with al-Qaeda" but are "prepared to carry out attacks in solidarity with or support of al-Qaeda's radical jihadi agenda," described elsewhere as "lone wolves" or "wolf packs."[11] As Hoffman points out, this complex, diverse, and multilayered Al Qaeda global movement, which includes ISIS, is held together by an ideological narrative of "a shared sense of enmity and grievance towards the United States and the West in general, and their host-nations in particular."[12]

The Evolving Jemaah Islamiyah Ideological Milieu in Southeast Asia

The narrowly thwarted December 2001 JI plot to attack Western targets in Singapore a mere two months after the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, DC, was a shock to the public. What intensified the shock was that the Singapore operation had been intended to involve the assistance of an Al Qaeda operative. The plan had been to employ six truck bombs, each rigged with three tons of ammonium nitrate, to attack six sites simultaneously. Potential targets included the US, British, Australian, and Israeli diplomatic missions, Changi Naval Base and Sembawang Wharf (because these were used by US naval forces), and US commercial interests in Singapore. The Internal Security Department managed, however, to disrupt the JI plot, arresting fifteen individuals in December and another twenty-one in August 2002 in a follow-up sweep that decimated the network in Singapore. All but four of those detained were JI members.[13] While JI at the time was affiliated with Al Qaeda, it was more than simply an extraregional "implant" in Southeast Asia. JI had roots in the old postwar Darul Islam separatist movement in Indonesia that had sought between 1948 and 1962 to establish a Negara Islam Indonesia (or Indonesian Islamic State) centered in the restive West Java province of the far-flung archipelago. But with the capture and execution of the charismatic Darul Islam founder S. M. Kartosoewirjo in 1962, the movement factionalized. Nevertheless, by the early 1970s, two Kartosoewirjo acolytes, the fiery orator Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, deeply inspired by the Darul Islam founder's zeal to establish Islamic or shariah law throughout Indonesia, had begun a campaign of political and ultimately violent, though low-key, agitation against the authoritarian New Order regime of President Soeharto. These men were further radicalized during their incarceration by the New Order government from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. Matters were made worse in 1984 by Jakarta's historic decision to require all social and political institutions in the country to abide by the policy of *asas tunggal*—or sole loyalty to the state ideology of Pancasila[14]—rather than Islamic or other formulations—and by the heavy-handed security-force repression of Muslim disturbances at the port of Tanjong Priok. This episode prompted Sungkar, Ba'asyir, and their followers to decamp the following year across the Malacca Strait to Malaysia.[15]

During the long Malaysian hiatus (1985–1999), Sungkar and Ba'asyir, inspired by the clarion call of overseas Islamist activists, such as the Palestinian-Jordanian ideologue Abdullah Azzam, to participate in a multinational jihad against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, began gradually to imbibe the notion that the entire world, not just Indonesia, should be transformed by force if need be into an abode of Islam. By January 1993, these ideological shifts had helped precipitate a split between Sungkar and Ba'asyir and the wider Indonesian Darul Islam circles.

The split led to the formal setting up of JI as an Indonesian-based but transnational Southeast Asian terror network aligned with the so-called global jihad vision of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda and committed to the creation of a pan–Southeast Asian Islamic state. That state would encompass Muslim communities stretching from southern Thailand south across Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia and east to the southern Philippines and even to Australia. JI, originally a hierarchical entity with a well-defined administrative structure,[16] embarked on a campaign of terror attacks that began in August 2000 and culminated in the foiled December 2001 Singapore plot. The Singapore plot was a Plan A; its failure led to Plan B, the infamous October 12, 2002, suicide-bombing attacks on Bali nightclubs that killed 202 civilians, including 88 Australians.

The Bali bombings reiterated the very real threat of the JI network to Southeast Asian security, which was played out in further deadly attacks by the network and its various splinters throughout the decade. Among these was a bombing of the Jakarta Marriott in August 2003, an attack outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta in September 2004, a second series of attacks in Bali in October 2005, and, after a four-year gap, a suicide bombing that targeted the Jakarta Ritz-Carlton and, again, the nearby Marriott in July 2009.[17] Since then, internal dissension among leading personalities and external security force pressure has sundered the JI network, causing it to evolve and create new entities. Most notable among these is Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) led by Ba'asyir, who was jailed for terrorism-related offenses in August 2010; and more recently, a virulent JAT off-shoot, based in Poso in the Central Sulawesi province of eastern Indonesia and aptly called Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, led by the long-standing Public Enemy Number One, Santoso, till his elimination by the Indonesian security forces in July 2016.[18] It is in such inclement waters that ISIS has been fishing with a disquieting degree of success.

Growing out of the older entity Al Qaeda in Iraq, which had long been the "most fractious and disloyal franchise" of Al Qaeda Central, ISIS was "excommunicated from the network in 2014 after disobeying commands" from the current Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and "starting an internecine war with fellow jihadists in Syria which left thousands dead on both sides."[19] Since the ISIS leader Baghdadi inaugurated the caliphate at the end of June 2014, ISIS has "gone on to build a global network of affiliates and branches that now stretches from Afghanistan to west Africa." Its online magazine *Dabiq* has even dismissed its parent network as a "drowned entity" and an unsuccessful relic of the past.[20] The historic Al Qaeda–ISIS split has had an impact in Southeast Asia as well. Some analysts estimate that about thirty regional militant groups in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have pledged allegiance to ISIS in the past year.[21] In the strategic country of Indonesia, most senior activists of the older JI network support Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate Al-Nusra. But Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, JAT, and key extremist leaders, such as Ba'asyir and the other leading Islamist extremist ideologue, Aman Abdurrahman, support ISIS. Ba'asyir's sons, however, Abdul Rohim and Rosyid Ridho, disagreeing with their father's pledge of allegiance to ISIS, left his JAT entity to form yet another splinter group, Jemaah Ansharusy Shariah (JAS). JAS eschews the global pretensions of ISIS to focus on establishing Islamic law within Indonesia. Furthermore, the group rejects the notion that ISIS has the legitimacy to declare a global caliphate and has even sought to recruit Indonesian fighters for its chief rival, Al-Nusra, in Syria.[22]

Despite these complex schisms and realignments within the Indonesian Islamist milieu in response to the tectonic ideological and institutional shifts in the Middle East, the dramatic rise of ISIS has energized the transnational Islamist terrorist movement in Southeast Asia, which has been decimated by strong security and law enforcement action in the past decade or so. In 2014 and 2015 new cells appeared in Malaysia. In August 2014, for example, 19 suspected militants were arrested by Malaysian authorities for planning attacks in and around the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur against pubs, discos, and a Carlsberg brewery. Ominously,

the group—in an echo of the original JI goal—had even sought to create a new Southeast Asian caliphate spanning Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore. [23] Subsequently, it was revealed in April 2015 that 70 Malaysian military personnel were "involved" with ISIS.[24] Four months later another 6 security personnel were arrested for ISIS links, raising fears that "ISIS is targeting this particular group for recruitment as they are trained fighters with access to weapons." By August 2015, 121 Malaysians, including civil servants, educators, and the 70 military personnel, had been arrested.[25] So concerned were the Malaysian authorities that in a dramatic reversal of policy, Kuala Lumpur in May 2015 passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Like its controversial predecessor, the powerful Internal Security Act that was repealed a few years earlier, the new act contains provisions for preventive detention of suspected militants without trial for up to fifty-nine days. Two-year extensions of prison sentences and discontinuations of detentions will be decided by the Prevention of Terrorism Board rather than by judicial review.[26]

As noted earlier, the emergence of Katibah Nusantara has heightened anxiety, in part because it has been implicated in providing assistance to Indonesian terrorist groups, including funding several thwarted bomb plots in the country.[27] The unit was apparently formed in Shaddadi, in the Syrian governorate of Hasakah, in September 2014. It started out as a 100-man unit of Indonesian and Malaysian fighters, and by October 2015 it had grown sufficiently to form three geographical subunits led by Indonesian nationals: Katibah Nusantara Central, led by Bahrumsyah; Katibah Masyariq, led by the Homs-based Salim Mubarok At-Tamimi alias Abu Jandal; and Katibah Aleppo, led by Abu Abdillah. Bahrumsyah is the amir of Katibah Nusantara and has developed a reputation for dealing harshly with Indonesian ISIS fighters that attempt to defect and undermine Katibah Nusantara unity. In October 2015, about 450 Indonesian and Malaysian fighters and their families were in the Iraq/Syrian region under ISIS/Katibah Nusantara control.[28] More ominously, Katibah Nusantara has set up the Abdullah Azzam Academy for the education and military training of children of Malaysian and Indonesian fighters. The medium of instruction is the Malay language, and it is clear that Katibah Nusantara is training a new generation of Malay-speaking militants indoctrinated from childhood to be committed to the core belief that the setting up of the Southeast Asian *wilayat* of ISIS is a long-term God-given mission. In March 2015, ISIS posted a two-minute video showing Malay children training with weapons in ISIS-held territory. The video declares that these children will "finish all oppressors, disbelievers, apostates" and ends with a child firing a revolver. The underlying theme is sobering: "These children will be the next generation of fighters. You can capture us, kill us, we will regenerate, no matter how hard you try."[29]

What seems thus far to be greatly aiding the ISIS/Katibah Nusantara cause is its extensive and adroit use of social media. Analysts have noted a "surge in Indonesian- and Malay-language material posted by ISIS online,"[30] as its media division, Al-Hayat, has ramped up targeted content in the form of media statements, videos, and periodicals, such as *Dabiq*, which has an Indonesian-language version, with a view to intensifying its outreach to vulnerable Southeast Asian Malay-Muslim communities. To this end, Al-Hayat "relies on its online 'fan base' in closed chat groups of forums" to soak up such content and ensure that it is "pushed across social media spheres like Twitter, Facebook and Google+."[31] At one level, such a barrage of virulent ISIS ideological and mobilizational social media content may well inspire lone-wolf activity. The August 2015 issue of *Dabiq*, for example, called on supporters to attack the embassies of countries engaged in the global anti-ISIS coalition, which notably includes Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. [32] At another, more fundamental level, such ISIS propaganda, which often features an extreme anti-Shia bias, may ultimately compel a worrying deterioration of wider Sunni-Shia relations in Southeast Asia. As it is, the virulent ISIS message already finds fallow ground in Indonesia, where rising sectarian intolerance prompted the

Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace in Indonesia to report a worrying threefold increase in anti-Shia violence between 2012 and 2013.[33]

How Radicalization into Violent Extremism Occurs

Why have almost nine hundred young Southeast Asian Muslims—largely but not exclusively Indonesians and Malaysians—apparently nailed their colors to the ISIS mast as of November 2015? Answering this question requires delving into the contentious issue of what factors drive RIVE. The debate is ongoing;[34] hence, this section can highlight only a few of the common explanations. Even the term "radicalization" has been the subject of debate, with some analysts lamenting that the term is ambiguous but that it may be too late to change tack since the term has apparently stuck within analytical communities within and outside governments.[35] It has several definitions. One fairly typical US interpretation is that it is "the process of adopting or promoting an extremist belief system for the purpose of facilitating ideologically based violence to advance political, religious, or social change."[36] Some British analysts describe it as a "process by which individuals come to undertake terrorist activity, or directly aid or abet terrorism."[37] While some analysts argue that radicalization may not necessarily result in terrorism, most argue that radicalization can and does often result in violent extremism, which may find expression in terrorist violence. A seminal 2007 report by the Intelligence Division of the New York Police Department (NYPD) asserts that terrorism is the end-product of the radicalization process.[38] Other analysts have attempted finer-grained explanations of the process. For example, a comprehensive report by the Homeland Security Policy Institute of George Washington University and the University of Virginia's Critical Incident Analysis Group argues that individual religious radicalization occurs when a person is exposed to a "radical religious services provider or charismatic person espousing radical ideas" and becomes a "lone-wolf" terrorist pursuing violent action on his own; though it is possible that such a lone wolf may seek out an ideologically supportive logistics network.[39] The same report warns of organized religious radicalization, a "process supported by external groups"—such as the Singapore JI in the late 1990s— "who seek to influence" vulnerable individuals. In this instance, such individuals are provided with materials that include nontraditional interpretations of holy texts and directed to supportive social spaces that espouse violence, such as radical mosques and schools. Organized radicalization is thus a top-down recruiting process in which susceptible individuals are "recruited to carry out specific actions in support of the group's agenda."[40]

The 2007 NYPD report identifies four stages of radicalization: "pre-radicalization"; "self-identification," in which individuals first become attracted to violent religious ideologies through a "cognitive opening caused by some personal, socio-economic or political crisis"; "indoctrination," in which a gradual intensification of violent beliefs occurs principally through contact with a charismatic "spiritual sanctioner" and a small group of "like-minded" individuals; and "jihadization," in which the RIVE process is consummated and the individual, now reconstruing himself as a warrior in the path of God, is ready to mount terrorist attacks. "The progression of searching, finding, adopting, nurturing, and developing" this extreme religious belief system, the report suggests, "to the point where it acts as a catalyst for a terrorist act" characterizes the process of RIVE.[41] Randy Borum offers a four-stage model, in which an individual first encounters an upsetting event, condition, or grievance ("It's not right.") and then evaluates it as being unjust ("It's not fair."). In the third stage the radicalizing individual attributes the unjust situation to a target policy, person, or nation ("It's your fault."), and in the fourth stage, vilifies and demonizes that responsible party ("You're evil."). This final stage, Borum suggests, leads to "justification or impetus for aggression."[42] Fathali Moghaddam offers the "Staircase" model, which comprises six stages. The pathway to terrorist violence begins

when an individual, powerless to overcome a perceived adversity, experiences a profound frustration that develops into aggressive sentiments displaced onto a specific target group. The process continues when the aggrieved individual joins a terrorist organization, internalizing its stark us-versus-them ideological narrative, and ultimately overcomes remaining moral inhibitions against violence to embark on terrorist acts.[43]

Complementing the NYPD, Borum, and Moghaddam stage models are process models, focusing on the factors, drivers, or mechanisms that promote RIVE. These include the US National Counter-Terrorism Center model, which emphasizes the interaction between personal, group, community, sociopolitical, and ideological factors.[44] Alex Schmid identifies factors operating at the macro, meso, and micro levels that are crucial for grasping the radicalization process for a particular individual. Schmid's macro level refers to structural factors, such as the role of government and society at home and abroad, socioeconomic deficits, and tense majority-minority relationships, especially when foreign diasporas are implicated. The meso level refers to "the supportive or even complicit social surround—which serves as a rallying point and is the 'missing link' with the terrorists' broader constituency or reference group that is aggrieved and suffering injustices." The micro level refers to "the individual level" and involves, for example, "identity problems, failed integration, feelings of alienation, marginalisation, discrimination, relative deprivation, humiliation (direct or by proxy), [and] stigmatisation and rejection, often combined with moral outrage and feelings of (vicarious) revenge."[45]

A similar concern for a deeper understanding of how influences at various levels of analysis interact to influence the RIVE process drives this author's multiperspectival Radical Pathways Framework, which emphasizes the interaction between human nature, culture, ideology, small-group dynamics, and the individual personality as key influences in the RIVE process for a particular individual of concern.[46] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko have identified six mechanisms of individual political radicalization: personal grievance, group grievance, the slippery slope, love, thrill-seeking, and unfreezing.[47] Joshua Sinai offers a mixed stage/process model. He first identifies a radicalization, mobilization, and action stage, then isolates six elements that impact the radicalization phase: personal, political and socioeconomic, ideological, community, group, and enabling factors. Sinai argues that the mobilization stage is influenced by the three factors of opportunity, capability, and readiness to act. Finally, the target selection activity—the focus of the action stage and the culmination of the RIVE process—is reached.[48]

Ideological and Cognitive Features of Radicalization into Violent Extremism

While the debate continues over whether stage or process models are employed to understand the process of RIVE, the end-state—the radicalized, violent Islamist extremist of ISIS and similar groups—is of great concern as a contemporary policy issue. In this section, we examine the violent ISIS extremist, the current focus of governments and civil societies in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Two key features stand out: one ideological, one cognitive. The example employed is that of a radicalized young American who fits into the fourth dimension of Hoffman's typology of the global Al Qaeda movement: "Al-Qaeda Galaxy," which, to recapitulate, refers to the lone wolves or wolf packs influenced by the ideological narrative of Al Qaeda, or in this instance the Al Qaeda mutation called ISIS. What is striking is that the ideological and cognitive features of this radicalized young American are similar to those of his counterparts in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and elsewhere.

The Ideological Feature: Violent Islamism

In January 2015 a twenty-year-old American man called Christopher Cornell was arrested for what appeared to be an ISIS-inspired plot to kill US president Barack Obama and other lawmakers. Cornell's FBI interrogation testimony proved revealing:

> What would I have done? I would have took [*sic*] my gun, I would have put it to Obama's head and I would have pulled the trigger. . . . Then I would have released more bullets on the Senate and the House of Representative members, and I would have attacked the Israeli Embassy and various other buildings full of *kafir* [unbelievers] . . . who want to wage war against us Muslims and shed our blood. That's what would happen. I got orders from the brothers overseas because I'm with the Islamic State. My brothers over there, in Syria and Iraq, gave me specific orders to carry out jihad in the West, so I did so.[49]

A close analysis of Cornell's musings suggests the existence of ideological and cognitive elements sustaining his radicalized state of mind. Ideologically, Cornell's justification for his planned violence against the top symbols of the US government is not unique. It reflects a deep immersion in the narrative of violent Islamism. Though some scholars reject the term "Islamism," analytical communities everywhere acknowledge its heuristic value.[50] Islamism—also sometimes referred to as political Islam—avers that "Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world" and hence actively seeks "to implement this idea in some fashion."[51] Daniel Pipes adds that Islamism "turns the traditional religion of Islam into a twentieth-century-style ideology" and asserts that Islamists seek to "build the just society by regimenting people according to a preconceived plan, only this time with an Islamic orientation."[52] In other words, as A. G. Noorani pithily observes, "Islamism is not Islam."[53] Because Al Qaeda and its many offshoots, including, latterly, ISIS, seek to forcibly reorder societies according, as Pipes suggests, to some "preconceived plan, only this time with an Islamic orientation," they are more accurately regarded as violent Islamists. Other terms used in the literature to refer to the same broad phenomenon include Al Qaedaism,[54] jihadi Islamism,[55] salafi jihadism,[56] jihadi salafism,[57] and even "Bin Ladenism."[58]

Violent Islamism is characterized by a common master narrative within which specific stories in various periods and geographical zones "come and go, change and morph" while the overall narrative structure remains resilient.[59] Cornell's articulated belief that US and Israeli political leaders "want to wage war against us Muslims and shed our blood" sums up a first core element of the violent Islamist narrative: that the Muslim world is involved in a cosmic war for survival with the "US army of the Cross and its allies."[60] A second core element of the violent Islamist ideological narrative is the notion that all Western and allied civilians have "dirty hands" because their political support and taxes enable Western and allied governments to engage in or support oppression of Muslims in places such as Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya, and Kashmir.[61] A third core element is reciprocity or the ancient dictum of "an eye for an eye," that is, if the United States and its allies target innocent Muslim civilians in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, the militants will target Western civilians in reprisal.[62] Fourth and no less important, violent Islamists prioritize the Islamic principle of *al-wala wal-bara'*—or the unity of all Muslims in relation to non-Muslims—to an extreme level, deeply reinforcing a rigid binary worldview that can help justify extremist violence against Western and allied civilians.[63] Such black-and-white, heavily dichotomized "us-versus-them" thinking comes out clearly in Cornell's musings. Similar mind-sets exist within influential Islamist extremist milieus in Southeast Asia. For example, in Indonesia, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's son, the Abdul Rohim, leader of the new splinter group JAS, told an Australian journalist in 2011:

> From our understanding, based on the Koran, Allah . . . told us that infidels will always try to fight Muslims, trying to rip you from your religion. . . . We believe the Koran states they will continue to fight us, trying to make us leave the Koran, to leave sharia, to leave Allah and the Prophet's teachings. . . . Allah said that they (Christians) will continue to fight you until the end of time. . . . We believe it is them who do not believe in tolerance. The infidels have always caused disturbance against Muslims. Muslims believe that if we get attacked then we have to rise up for jihad.[64]

The Cognitive Feature: Extremism

As Rohim's statement suggests, individuals like him and his counterparts elsewhere, such as Cornell, who are radicalized into violent Islamism of the ISIS variety, are characterized by their specific ideological beliefs and by the intensity with which they cleave to them. In a word, they are extremists. Like the term "radicalization," the term "extremism" is contested. In the view of some scholars, extremism suggests "being at the margins, of existing on the boundaries or of functioning at the edges" and only tenuously linked to the normative core or center.[65] In this sense, extremism represents a "deviation from the norm or the majority."[66] "Extremism," to elaborate further, "takes its own wider group identity—be it religion or tradition—to an extreme; not by a move away from the centre, but rather by intensifying its self-understanding and self-proclamation as representing, or being, the centre."[67] The term "extremism" possesses at least one more interpretation, however, which lends itself to the current analysis of ISIS extremism in Southeast Asia. K. M. Klein and A. W. Kruglanski argue that it means "zeal or profound conviction" for "a particular position or attitude on a given issue."[68] Nevertheless, while some scholars posit that being extremist in one's views does not necessarily mean being violent, and that when "people shift from indifference to intense concern with local problems, such as poverty and crime," "extreme movements are good, even great,"[69] and others say that "extremism is not necessarily bad or good" and can be "employed in the service of goals that may be valued either positively or negatively by a given individual or group,"[70] it is the contention here that extremism should be acknowledged as a serious policy problem.

Extremism refers to a mind-set that offers fallow ground for terrorist violence to flourish. Important recent work by Alex Schmid provides persuasive evidence of this reality. Based on close scrutiny of decades of research into the psychology of fascism and communism, Schmid insists that a distinction between "(open-minded) radicals and (closed minded) extremists" is necessary. While radicals advocate sweeping political change, and on occasion their "system-transforming" solutions may well be "violent and non-democratic, it does not follow," Schmid points out, "that a radical attitude must result in violent behavior." Instead, he avers, some radicals historically have shown themselves to be "open to rationality and pragmatic compromise" and even "tolerant, pluralist and anti-authoritarian." More to the point, "radical militants can be brought back into the mainstream."[71] Extremists, in contrast, are more than just radicals. The extremist "state of mind," Schmid observes, "tolerates no diversity." It is intolerant and dogmatic and adheres to an "ideology" delineating "a simplified monocausal interpretation of the world where you are either with them or against them." Schmid makes the important assertion that extremists are "positively in favour of the use of force to obtain and maintain political power, although they may be vague and ambiguous in their public pronouncements, especially when they are in a position of weakness."[72] For this reason, it behooves policy communities in Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, to recognize that extremism is not harmless but instead possesses violent potentials that under the right circumstances could find expression in terrorism.[73] This point requires elaboration, which is the task of the following section.

"Non-Violent" Extremism? More Like "Not-Yet Violent" Extremism

Joshua Sinai reflects a widely shared attitude in Western liberal democratic societies when he argues that "expressing extremist views is a legal and a legitimate form of expression in pluralistic and democratic societies."[74] Other voices add that "non-violent extremist groups" may well act as a "legal 'safety valve' for extreme views."[75] Such assumptions, however, have been undermined by important recent research in two related areas: "dangerous speech" and the psychology of disgust. Dangerous speech, according to Susan Benesch, is "an act of speech [that] has a reasonable chance of catalyzing or amplifying violence by one group against another, given the circumstances in which it was made or disseminated."[76] Dangerous speech occurs when several key variables are present. These include a charismatic speaker who possesses significant influence over a particular audience, a vulnerable audience that possesses socioeconomic and political grievances and anxieties that can be exploited by the speaker, speech content that dehumanizes the out-group "as vermin, pests, insects or animals" and actively justifies violence against its members as legitimate self-defense, a sociohistorical context of past intergroup conflict and weak rule of law, and lack of access to countervailing sources of information. Benesch cites recent empirical research on the role of dangerous speech in the 1994 Rwandan genocide as evidence that extremist rhetoric possesses violent potentials that could precipitate mass violence when the right supporting conditions from among the key variables listed earlier are present.[77]

Paul Rozin's work on the psychology of disgust provides a second reason for greater circumspection in assuming that nonviolent extremist rhetoric is harmless and should enjoy legal protection.[78] Employing insights from the increasingly significant discipline of evolutionary psychology, Rozin argues that the psychology of disgust is an evolved instinct in human beings.[79] This instinct emerged in ancestral environments in which early human bands—predators and other warring tribes aside—also had to worry about the unseen threat posed by bacteria and viruses lurking within plants and the bodies of dead animals. In these circumstances a powerful, instinctive physical and emotional revulsion in the presence of rotting food and corpses, dirt and excrement evolved as a significant evolutionary adaptation.[80] As it turns out, so finely tuned is the evolved contagion-avoidance instinct within humans that we automatically assume that "limited contact, however brief," with a source of dangerous contamination "transmits the whole of the risk."[81] Thus, when insects such as flies or cockroaches are found in only one part of our food, we demand that all the food be taken away.[82] This evolved, unconscious contagion-avoidance instinct can also be activated when religious communities confront members of out-groups that extremist ideologues stereotype as unclean; hence the command in some religious scriptures, John Teehan points out, to destroy entire "sinful" cities and towns because they are "polluted and so everything in [them] must go."[83] David Livingstone Smith makes a similar point, referring to what he calls the "antiparasite module." When the "antiparasite module is activated [in conflict] and turned against fellow human beings," he says, "the stage is set for genocide."[84]

This is the point where the psychology of disgust meets the dangerous speech Benesch describes to evince why "nonviolent extremism" is an oxymoron. Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley in their research into genocide show that when out-group members are compared with "pigs, rats, maggots, cockroaches, and other vermin," a link between "disgust and genocide" is established, because these "disgusting characteristics" of the out-group "threaten to pollute the environment and must be eliminated."[85] Thus, during the Rwandan genocide Hutu extremists called the Tutsi rivals *inyenzi,* meaning "cockroaches" or "insects," and Nazis cognitively reframed Jews as "parasites," "filth," "excrement," "plague," or "tuberculosis."[86] In Middle Eastern "songs, books, newspaper articles and blogs,"[87] Jews are subject to

"linguistic dehumanization"[88] and are often compared to "pigs, donkeys, rats and cockroaches, and also to vampires and a host of other imaginary creatures."[89] The linguistic dehumanization driven by the psychology of disgust and manifested in dangerous speech in Islamist extremism may also be referred to as satanization. There it is held that out-group enemies "who embody pure evil cannot be argued with or compromised with; they can only be destroyed" as a "moral duty."[90]

Dangerous speech and the psychology of disgust thus reside at the core of the Islamist extremism of ISIS and its affiliates, whether violent or "nonviolent." More than that, for the reasons described earlier, it makes little sense to append the qualifying adjective "nonviolent" to the term "extremism," because the latter carries within itself violent potentials that await consummation in the right external circumstances. Thus Schmid argues that the radicalized extremist is not really a nonviolent extremist. He is what can more accurately be described as a "not-violent" or "not-yet violent" extremist.

> Principled non-violent action is a radical alternative to existing forms of conflict waging where violence or at least the threat thereof is an instrument of achieving goals against an opponent's resistance. In that sense "non-violence" differs from "not-violent" forms of conflict waging where the non-use of violence is based merely on pragmatic, tactical and/or temporal considerations (in the sense of "not-now-violent"), not on a principled political philosophy that seeks to hold the moral high ground in the face of a violent opponent.

"In the sense of the above," he concludes, "'non-violent extremism' is a misleading term."[91]

That Islamist extremism, not just its so-called violent expressions, is the real problem is exemplified in Southeast Asia by several prominent examples. Perhaps the most well-known is the aforementioned incarcerated JI spiritual leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. That Ba'asyir's worldview, often articulated in his sermons, is emblematic of the dichotomous, dogmatic, us-and-them cognition of the Islamist extremist has long been known in Southeast Asian circles.

> God has divided humanity into two parts, namely the followers of God and those who follow Satan. . . . God's group are those who follow Islam, those who are prepared to follow his laws and struggle for the implementation of *shariah* law. . . . Meanwhile what is meant by Satan's group are those people who oppose God's law, who . . . throw obstacles in the path of the implementation of God's law. . . . We would rather die than follow that which you worship. We reject all of your beliefs, we reject all of your ideologies, we reject all of your teachings on social issues, economics or beliefs.

"Between you and us," he insists, "there will forever be a ravine of hate and we will be enemies until you follow God's law."[92]

In a separate interview with Scott Atran and Taufik Andrie, Ba'asyir exhibits yet another feature of the Islamist extremist, the desire for power and ultimately global domination.

> [The Western states] have to stop fighting Islam, but that's impossible because it is *"sunnatullah"* [destiny, a law of nature], as Allah has said in the Qu'ran. They will constantly be enemies. But they'll lose . . . and Islam will win. That was what the Prophet Muhammad has said. Islam must win and Westerners will be destroyed. . . . If they want to have peace, they have to accept to be governed by Islam.[93]

Ba'asyir's sermons have on occasion evinced clear violent potentials that under the right conditions could prompt terrorist violence. On October 22, 2007, for example, in an address in East Java to a crowd of young people organized by the Java North Coast Islamic Youth Group in which Ba'asyir urged Muslims in Indonesia to "reject the laws of the nation's parliament" because "following state laws that contradicted Islamic Shariah law was an act of blasphemy," he encouraged young Javanese youth to "just beat up" foreigners and "not tolerate them."[94] Furthermore, he activated the psychology of disgust by openly engaging in linguistic dehumanization, dismissing non-Muslim tourists in Bali as "worms, snakes, maggots," in short, "animals that crawl."[95] What is particularly striking is that several of Ba'asyir acolytes who played key roles in the JI network that perpetrated the October 2002 Bali atrocity, also engaged in linguistic dehumanization of out-groups. For example, Mukhlas described westerners as "dirty animals and insects that need to be wiped out"; co-conspirator Hambali called westerners "white meat"; Imam Samudra called them "whiteys" and "blood-sucking monsters"; and the "smiling" Bali bomber Amrozi callously informed his interrogators that "Australians, Americans, whatever—they are all white people."[96] To dismiss these terrorists as racists would only scratch the surface of the problem. The insidious effects of the psychology of disgust embedded in dangerous, linguistically dehumanizing extremist speech is the real underlying issue and not one that is so easily dismissed by even the most doctrinaire liberal. The former British Islamist Ed Husain observes that certain worldviews, "even when held without advocating violence" nevertheless provide the "mood music" that encourages terrorist acts.[97]

It is important to acknowledge, moreover, that the mood music Husain has in mind need not be uniquely Southeast Asian but can be of a more general character. The notorious British Islamist Anjem Choudary, for example, played a role in the United Kingdom that in some ways is analogous to Ba'asyir's in Indonesia's. Choudary, a former lawyer and self-styled expert on shariah law, was at one time the spokesperson for the extremist group al-Mujahiroun, an offshoot of the older Islamist Hizbut Tahrir organization, formed in the 1990s and led by the Syrian extremist Omar Bakri Muhammad until his expulsion from the United Kingdom in 2005. Al-Mujahiroun was banned in 2004 but re-formed itself several times between 2005 and 2010 under different names, such as Saviour Sect, Muslims against Crusades, and Islam4UK. All these subsequent incarnations, however, were all also banned. In September 2014 Choudary—who had always managed to stay on the right side of British law despite criticisms from moderate Muslim groups that his rhetoric was extreme—was finally arrested for allegedly drumming up support for ISIS and for circulating material that could be interpreted as encouraging terrorist violence.[98] Two years later a judge sentenced Choudary to jail for five a half years for his activities in support of ISIS.[99] Like Ba'asyir's, Choudary's extremism is readily evinced by his desire that Islam should dominate all comers, by force if need be. In an interview with the extremist website Arrahmah.com in Indonesia—tellingly, a country he visited in 2010—he declared:

> The work for the Khilafah [caliphate] is the vital issue for Muslims everywhere, although the burning issue and priority is Jihad. Muslims in Indonesia must take the authority from those who have it and appoint a Khalifah who will implement the Shari'ah. In the meantime whilst they are living under the Kufr system they must engage in presenting Islam as an alternative to the man made law and support those who are trying to take back the authority which is their right. The twin duties of Daw'ah and Jihad cannot be separated.[100]

Like Ba'asyir's, Choudary's ostensibly "nonviolent" extremism tends to produce violent extremists. Michael Adebolajo, for example, implicated in the brutal daylight slaying of the

British soldier Lee Rigby in May 2013, had attended Choudary's "religious meetings" between 2004 and 2011.[101] In addition, another of Choudary's acolytes, the Indian-born Islamist activist Abu Rumaysah (also known as Siddhartha Dhar), who had appeared on British television to extol life under shariah law, was arrested along with Choudary in September 2014 but skipped bail, fleeing the United Kingdom to join ISIS.[102] It has been suggested that Dhar even mentored Adebolajo while both were immersed in the "mood music" of Choudary's gatherings.[103] Furthermore, Choudary's online "study sessions" have been credited by knowledgeable observers to have helped promote extremist movements in Indonesia, such as Sharia4Indonesia, inspired by Choudary's banned Islam4UK project. More ominously, and of deep concern to Southeast Asian security analysts, some of Choudary's Indonesian admirers, notably Bahrumsyah (also known as Muhammad al Indunisi), are key figures in Katibah Nusantara.[104]

Policy Options

In a 2015 commentary, Andri Wanto and Abdul Mateen Qadri warn that the prevailing laissez-faire approach by Muslim-majority Indonesia and Malaysia to nonviolent Islamist extremist organizations in both countries have helped lay "the foundation" of a "narrow and dogmatic interpretation of Islam" among local communities. This approach has aided the latter-day propaganda and recruitment efforts of ISIS, because the "emphasis on a strict, legalistic, and exclusive understanding of Islam" that has been allowed to emerge in some segments of both societies essentially divides "society into 'the house of Islam' (Dar al-Islam) and 'the house of the enemy' (Dar al-Harb), resulting in the perception that non-Muslims are permanent 'enemies of Islam.'"[105] To be sure, the progressive Muslim mass civil organizations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, have belatedly tried to reinforce the peaceful, moderate, and culturally authentic Indonesian Islam for which the country has long been renowned. For example, while the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama has recently promoted itself as the "guardians" of "Islam Nusantara" (Islam of the Indonesian Archipelago), the modernist Muhammadiyah has similarly pushed for the notion of "Islam Berkemajuan" (progressive Islam).[106] By contrast, in Malaysia, the current situation seems to be a cause for concern because of the ongoing "Islamisation race" since the 1980s between the ruling ethnic Malay political party called the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Islamist-oriented Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS). For years UMNO has tried to politically outflank PAS—some call it engaging in "piety-outbidding"[107]—by co-opting into the governing apparatus elements of the Islamist party's platform. This thrust, however, has inadvertently fostered "a broader Islamisation process," thereby creating "an environment conducive to the emergence of a radical fringe"; hence, Wanto and Qadri worry that "the narrative of IS is likely to resonate" within such an exclusionary socioreligious and political milieu.[108]

What then can be done to stem the rising tide of Islamist extremism of the ISIS variety in Southeast Asia? While a comprehensive answer would require more space than is available here, two broad policy options—one strategic and one operational—appear apposite. At the strategic level, governments and civil societies in the region must do more to prevent extremism itself and not just its violent manifestations. As Schmid asserts, "Governments should challenge and resist all extremism, whether violent or not, whether it is Islamist or not." He explains: "Preventing violent extremism is not enough; rather all extremism—Islamist and beyond—ought to be prevented. . . . Rather than distinguishing between non-violent and violent extremists, we should distinguish between extremists and non-extremists and support the latter against Islamists at home and abroad."[109]

Countries like Singapore and Malaysia—former British colonies that were deeply engaged in fighting Communist subversion and violence during the Cold War decades —retain legacy antisedition legislation within their respective legal arsenals and are thus well positioned to

fight all forms of Islamist extremism.[110] The problem, however, is in the key country of Indonesia, where after years of debate, there remains little consensus on how to move forward to proscribe Islamist-inspired seditious and hate speech. In early November 2015, for example, the Indonesian National Police issued a circular ordering curbs on hate speech, understood as rhetoric aimed to encourage "inflicting hatred based on ethnicity, religion, belief, race, sexual orientation, skin color and disability" and disseminated through "different platforms such as campaign orations, posters, fliers, religious sermons, social and mass media and rallies." The Indonesian Press Council, however, criticized the circular, arguing that it threatened freedom of expression in the country.[111] But not everyone takes a sanguine view of such nonviolent though extremist rhetoric. The knowledgeable Indonesian civil society activist and former Darul Islam member Noor Huda Ismail, for example, warned in the preceding April that simply allowing ISIS-inspired anti-Shia rhetoric to be articulated freely in the country is "very dangerous because the youth are very vulnerable and easily seduced."[112] Huda argues instead for a middle way between doing nothing and the state repression of the Soeharto New Order regime and, above all, clarity in establishing "what Indonesian law says and how it should be enforced in the event of incitements of hatred, hate speech, recruitment, radicalization and other things."[113]

Another approach is to actively censure extremists.[114] The former Islamist Maajid Nawaz of the Quilliam Foundation, a leading counterextremism think tank in the United Kingdom, expressed concern in March 2015 that Islamist "entryist radicals" remain intent on penetrating Islamic student associations on British university campuses. The Islamic Society at the University of Westminster, he points out, has been one such target, adding that Mohamed Emwazi—better known as the notorious ISIS executioner Jihadi John who was reportedly killed in a US drone strike in November 2015[115]—was a computer science graduate of this university.[116] Nawaz argues that while institutions such as the University of Westminster "must guard free speech, they should also be vigilant to ensure that speakers are not given unchallenged platforms to promote their toxic message to a vulnerable audience," because such extremists, despite their superficially nonviolent veneer, "peddle a highly politicized, often violent strain" of the Islamic faith. A one-time activist of Hizbut Tahrir, Nawaz asserts that it "is easier than one might think for bright, capable people like Mr. Emwazi to fall for the myopic worldview of the preachers of hate" and that young people "from relatively prosperous, educated backgrounds have long been overrepresented in jihadist causes." The former British prime minister David Cameron, in launching the latest iteration of the United Kingdom's counterextremism strategy in October 2015, declared that under new "extremism disruption orders," "hate preachers" will be banned from exploiting the social media and the Internet to radicalize young people, though it remains to be seen how these measures can be effectively operationalized.[117] To repeat, dealing with extremism itself, not just its violent manifestations, is the key strategic task in preventing ISIS from further entrenching itself in Southeast Asia and in troubled communities elsewhere.

At the operational level, if one accepts the premise that violent Islamist extremists could well emerge from a wider extremist social milieu—as the examples of how the Ba'asyir and Choudary social networks appeared to berth such individuals attests—then it behooves governments and civil societies to ensure that the attitudinal and behavioral indicators of RIVE are more widely understood. Several attempts have been made in recent years to identify such indicators. The ISIS call described earlier for an intensification of hard-to-detect, low-signature lone-wolf attacks to destabilize the multicultural societies of Western and Southeast Asian countries underlines the importance of these efforts. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman, for example, drawing on an in-depth study of 117 violent Islamist terrorists in the United States and the United Kingdom, identified six common indicators of a potentially combustible transition from ostensibly nonviolent Islamist extremism to Islamist-driven

terrorist violence: the adoption of a legalistic interpretation of the faith; trusting the interpretations of a "select and ideologically rigid set of religious authorities"; perceiving an "inherent schism between Islam and the West" to the point of feeling that both camps are "incapable of co-existence"; displaying a low-tolerance of "perceived theological deviance," at times even violently opposing such "alternative interpretations and practices"; attempting to impose their preferred religious interpretations on others; and feeling that the only proper response to the supposed Western conspiracy against Muslims is "military action."[118] More recently, Katie Cohen and her colleagues have proposed that what they call "linguistic markers for radical violence" can be used to program computer algorithms to detect "weak signals" on social media forums of a possible transition to real-world lone-wolf violence. They suggest that it is possible to isolate markers for "leakage," where the subject of interest communicates to third parties in an online extremist forum of an intent to engage in violent acts; for "fixation," where the subject refers to certain individuals, groups, or issues with much greater frequency than do other discussants in the forum; and for "identification," where the subject's online text entries evince strong positive in-group commitment and the negative elements of "demonizing or dehumanizing the perceived enemy, which subsequently facilitates the justification of violence." [119]

After Paris: The Dangerous Growth and Persistence of ISIS Extremism

On November 13, 2015, Paris was subjected to a horrific terrorist attack that killed approximately 130 civilians and maimed scores more. The sophisticated, coordinated urban swarming tactics the terrorists employed when they assaulted restaurants, a concert hall, and the environs of a soccer stadium where a match was being played was reminiscent of the Mumbai assaults of November 2008. ISIS claimed responsibility for the atrocity and warned that the incident heralded the "start of the storm."[120] The Paris attacks were apparently carried out by jihadist cells in neighboring Belgium, where fears of terrorism had spiked over the past year, following the bloody attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine offices in Paris and a foiled terror plot targeting police in the eastern Belgian city of Verviers in January 2015. The apparent mastermind of the November Paris attacks, the Belgian-born ISIS fighter Abdelhamid Abaaoud, had apparently also had a hand in the Verviers incident.[121] Then on March 22, 2016, elements of the same ISIS network that had targeted Paris were implicated in an assault on Brussels airport and a nearby metro, killing thirty-two people. One person in particular, Salah Abdeslam, appears to have been a "logistics expert" with a hand in both attacks.[122] In February the previous year an Antwerp court had prosecuted the charismatic Islamist activist Fouad Belkacem over his involvement in Sharia4 Belgium, an organization the court deemed a "terrorist organisation that worked to violently replace democracy with a strict interpretation of sharia law" that had "allegedly brainwashed numerous young Muslims, recruiting them to join the Islamic State (Isis) or the al-Qaeda affiliate Nusra Front." Sharia4Belgium—tellingly—was formed "under the guidance" of Anjem Choudary, who called Belkacem "a dear friend of mine."[123] Sharia4Belgium had also been active in the largely Muslim enclave of Molenbeek in Brussels, one of Belgium's poorest areas with a youth unemployment rate of 40 percent. Both Abdelhamid Abaaoud and Salah Abdeslam were from Molenbeek.[124]

In a parallel development, ISIS extremism remains on the ascendant in Southeast Asia. A few days after the Paris attacks, Malaysian militants who were being tracked by police were said to be "hiding in the southern Philippines" and actively seeking to pull together "terror groups in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines" to form an "official" faction of ISIS in Southeast Asia.[125] Such efforts were mirrored in Indonesia, where some ISIS supporters reportedly banded together to form a new network called Ansharud Daulah Islamiyah (ADI). ADI sought to be "an embryonic province of the Islamic State," committed to "consolidating

their support base within Indonesia while also sending fighters to the caliphate's territory." Indonesian analysts suspect some of these fighters will return to Indonesia to "contribute to the local struggle."[126] Fears of a growing ISIS threat to the region have proven justified. On January 14, 2016, local militants mounted an attack in the business district in Jakarta, resulting in seven deaths involving all five attackers, a Canadian man, and a police officer. Muhammad Bahrun Naim, an Indonesian militant associated with ISIS/Katibah Nusantara and based in Syria, orchestrated the attack—aimed at foreigners and the security forces—with the cooperation of a local cell. The Indonesian police reported that the local militants had been instructed to try to emulate the Paris carnage of two months earlier.[127] Then in August 2016, Bahrun Naim's name surfaced again. This time he was implicated in a plot by another ISIS-linked cell on Indonesia's Batam island—a short ferry ride just to the south of Singapore—to fire a home-made rocket at Marina Bay in the city-state's business district.[128]

The attempts by Malaysian and Indonesian militants and supporters to establish an ISIS foothold within the region and the Katibah Nusantara grouping in Syria are the two prongs of a strategic pincer movement—one extra- and the other intra-regional—potentially engulfing Southeast Asia. From the ISIS perspective, the region—straddling militarily and commercially crucial sea-lanes of communication and, more important, home to a quarter of the world's Muslims—is in theory a rich strategic reserve for Baghdadi's putative caliphate. To be sure, it is known that ISIS requires that before a region like Southeast Asia is officially recognized as a *wilayat*, a centralized leadership in that region must be set up to bring together the various militant factions that have pledged allegiance or *ba'iat* to ISIS caliph Baghdadi. The idea is that there should be a simplified direct line of communication between ISIS and any "purported leadership" of the Southeast Asian *wilayat*. As seen, however, attempts are being made to achieve precisely that, particularly in the troubled southern Philippines.[129]

The "weak signals" of an emerging ISIS-inspired Syria/Iraq–Southeast Asian—and an even wider—axis is further hinted at in other ways. For example, according to some analysts, Muslim Uighur extremists from the restive Chinese province of Xinjiang likely perpetrated the August 2015 bombing of a popular Buddhist shrine in Bangkok frequented by Chinese tourists in which twenty people were killed.[130] In July 2015 Indonesian courts had prosecuted three Uighurs who had arrived illegally in Poso, Central Sulawesi, in eastern Indonesia—by way of Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaysia—to join up with the previously mentioned militant group Mujahidin Indonesia Timur led by the late Santoso. As noted, Santoso had thrown his group's support behind ISIS, and one of his aides had uploaded videos showing Uighurs training with Mujahidin Indonesia Timur and Santoso declaring that he would "welcome Islamic fighters from abroad."[131] The Indonesian police believe these Uighurs had links to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a separatist group based in Xinjiang.[132] Worryingly, reports suggest that other Uighurs had made contact with the Batam-based ISIS-linked cell that had plotted the foiled rocket attack on Singapore,[133] while several more had been spotted in the nascent ISIS proto-*wilayat* in the southern Philippines, along with Arab and Caucasian fighters.[134]

In sum, though a fully developed, active Southeast Asian *wilayat* of ISIS's global caliphate, acting as a major transit route and source of manpower and moral support for ISIS, may at this stage still be a relatively embryonic concept, regional trends suggest that there is little room for complacency among security and intelligence services. The steady and seemingly inexorable growth and persistence of ISIS extremism in Southeast Asia in this regard remains a significant source of concern. Regional governments and civil societies need little urging to heed the warning attributed to the Russian communist Leon Trotsky: "You may not be interested in War, but War is interested in you."

Notes

[1] Lim Yan Liang, "19-Year-Old Detained for Planning to Join ISIS Had Planned to Kill President and PM Lee," *Straits Times*, May 29, 2015,
http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/19-year-old-detained-for-planning-to-join-isis-had-planned-to-kill-president-and-pm-lee. See also, "Self-Radicalised Singaporean Youths: One Arrested, One Detained under ISA," *Channel NewsAsia*, May 27, 2015, http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/self-radicalised/1874758.html.

[2] This article uses the terms "terrorism" and "militancy" interchangeably. For a fuller discussion of the unresolved definitional challenges facing the student of terrorism, see Kumar Ramakrishna, *Radical Pathways: Understanding Muslim Radicalization in Indonesia* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger Security International, 2009), 7–11.

[3] Adam Minter, "Sharia Shakes Up Southeast Asia," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 25, 2015,
http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/Op-Ed/2015/01/25/Sharia-shakes-up-Southeast-Asia/stories/201501250108.

[4] Lim Yan Liang, "How Much of a Threat Is ISIS to the Region?," *Sunday Times* (Singapore), November 1, 2015, B2; see also, idem, "19-Year-Old Detained for Planning to Join ISIS."

[5] Jasminder Singh and Muhammad Haziq Jani, "Al-Fatihin: Islamic State's First Malay Language Newspaper," *RSIS Commentary*, CO16155, June 23, 2016, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CO16155.pdf.

[6] Kumar Ramakrishna, *Islamist Terrorism and Militancy in Indonesia: The Power of the Manichean Mindset* (Singapore: Springer, 2015), 108–9.

[7] All quoted passages referring to Bruce Hoffman's four dimensions of the global Al Qaeda movement in this passage are found in Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda and the Continuing Challenge of Counterterrorism and Homeland Security," *Home Team Journal,* no. 3 (2011): 77–83.

[8] Al-Nusra was renamed Jabhat Fatah al-Sham in July 2016. The new entity's declaration that it has cut ties with Al Qaeda, however, has attracted some skepticism. Martin Chulov, "Al-Nusra Front Cuts Ties with Al-Qaida and Renames Itself," *Guardian*, July 28, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/28/al-qaida-syria-nusra-split-terror-network.

[9] Scott Atran quoted in Lim Yan Liang, "Why Are Some People Attracted to ISIS?" *Sunday Times* (Singapore), November 1, 2015, B2.

[10] "July 7 Bombings Were Last Successful al-Qaeda Attack Osama bin Laden played a Role in, US Claims," *Telegraph,* July 13, 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/8633919/July-7-bombings-were-last-successful-al-Qaeda-attack-Osama-bin-Laden-played-a-role-in-US-claims.html.

[11] See Raffaello Pantucci, "A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists," *Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence* (London: International Center for the Study of Radicalisation, 2011).

[12] For a deeper analysis of the aggressive, apocalyptic Islamic religiosity driving ISIS, see Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *Atlantic,* March 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/. For a counterargument that downplays the role of Islam as a motivation for ISIS, see Mehdi Hasan, "How Islamic Is Islamic State?" *New Statesman*, March 10, 2015,
http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/03/mehdi-hasan-how-islamic-islamic-state.

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