"As Long As They Don't Use Violence"
Making Peace and Resisting Violent Extremism *in South-East Asia*

UNDP

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AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
AQ	Al-Qaida
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BTA	Bangsamoro Transitional Authority
CNRT	Council for National Timorese Resistance
CPP/NPA	Communist Party of the Philippines /New People's Army
DI	Darul Islam
DOM	*Daerah Operasi Militer* or Military Operations Zone
FKM	*Forum Kedaulatan Maluku* or Maluku Sovereignty Forum
FRETILIN	Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor or *Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente*
GAM	Free Aceh Movement
GOI	Government of Indonesia or *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*
GPH	Government of the Philippines
GWOT	Global War on Terror
ICG	International Crisis Group
IRA	Irish Republican Army
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
KOMPAK	Action Committee for Tackling the Consequences of the Crisis
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MOA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain
NVMS	National Violence Monitoring System
PVE	preventing violent extremism
RMS	Republic of South Maluku or *Forum Kedaulatan Maluku*
UBJP	United Bangsamoro Justice Party

CHANGING THE CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT IS OFTEN A COMPLEX SERIES OF FACTORS INFLUENCING DISENGAGEMENT, RESILIENCE, AND RESISTANCE TO EXTREMISM.

Buildings destroyed by the 2017 siege of Marawi, the Philippines
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Resolving conflict in South-East Asia has been an important part of controlling violent extremism in the region in the last two decades. Ending communal violence and long-running insurgencies by signing peace agreements has allowed violent extremism to become a manageable problem.

The prospect of a future stake in government has encouraged some insurgents to shun extremist groups. By coming up with new subnational systems for governing formerly rebellious provinces, governments have helped create both have resistance to extremist ideology and marginalized those insurgents still committed to the cause. The future success of these arrangements could provide an alternative to those groups that continue to advocate extremist violence as the only way to achieve militant goals such as sharia or independence. The South-East Asian experience shows that the tools of conflict resolution, support for peace processes, respect for human rights, and peacebuilding are still central to aiding the present challenges of preventing violent extremism.

Changing the conflict environment is one in a complex series of factors influencing disengagement, resilience, and resistance to extremism. The experience of South-East Asia shows how militants in the region are often ready to stop using violence to achieve their political goals. Even for extremist militants, changing the context that encouraged them to join violent groups is important for disengagement. Other factors include disillusionment, reconnecting with non-radical social networks, and a shift towards work and family life. In Indonesia, broad historical and political trends have undermined extremist groups. Indonesia's democracy is a decentralized one that allows regional interests to be represented and flexible enough to permit the advocacy of sharia. In the Philippines, a key distinction has been understanding the difference between insurgents and terrorists, and then treating the two groups differently.

Looking back, different conflicts provide various lessons on how peace and political processes interact with extremist groups in the Indonesian archipelago and the Philippines. In East Timor's struggle for independence, the resistance movement's frustration with a lack of political options led it to consider tactics usually associated with terrorist groups, such as an urban bombing campaign. In Aceh, an ethno-nationalist movement saw

international support as a lever aiding its strategic success and rejected any association with transnational and regional extremist groups. In the Maluku, communal violence responded better to a peace agreement, as the social fabric there was stronger and jihadis more disorganized. In Poso, also in Indonesia, a long-term strategy implemented by outside militants led to persistent violence long after a peace agreement was signed. In Mindanao in the Philippines, a deliberate effort was made by the government not to call insurgents terrorists and this persisted over many difficult years during negotiations. In turn, this commitment to a peace process encouraged insurgents to make unwelcome foreign jihadis and close their training camps.

These cases studies help illustrate a number of lessons from the region that might inform how real or perceived extremist threats can be understood in ongoing South-East Asian conflicts. Conflict can be an entry point to extremism and targeted prevention that differentiates between insurgent and extremist violence is important. In South-East Asia, ethno-nationalist insurgencies have proved to be a bulwark against extremists. Governments, insurgents, and terrorists all use violence as a tactic, but understanding the nature of each group's grievances, with whom to negotiate and sorting one kind of violent actor from another is important. While peace can take decades to negotiate, maintaining the momentum of a political process can be an important source of immunity against violent extremism. Insurgents who are committed to finding peace can also be partners in preventing violent extremism. The resolution of conflict remains a key part in promoting the disengagement and containment of violent radicals. The international community has a role to play by being more restrained in how it designates terrorists.

For those wishing to support the prevention of violent extremism in South-East Asia, it should be acknowledged that tools used in Indonesia and Philippines can contribute to ongoing challenges in places like Myanmar and Thailand. Insurgents with long standing grievances should be distinguished from terrorists. Instead of using terrorism laws to name and sanction insurgents, insurgents should be brought into established peace processes to minimize the potential of violent extremists taking advantage of these conflicts. Sustained political engagement rather than more unsuccessful deadly military campaigns should be the way forward. Environments that resist violent extremism can be maintained through conflict prevention or encouraged through

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THE REGIONAL EXPERIENCE SHOWS THAT PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM CAN ALSO BE ACHIEVED BY CREATING CENTRIPETAL FORCES THAT PULL EXTREMISTS TOWARDS THE CENTRE AND POLITICAL PROCESSES.

conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and investing in successful political transitions after a peace agreement. The regional experience shows that preventing violent extremism can also be achieved by creating centripetal forces that pull extremists towards the centre and political processes. This can include putting a premium on talks rather than military action. It can mean finding new ways to encourage militants to disengage from violence rather than focus on the more challenging goal of trying to deradicalize them. It can happen by providing pathways to peaceful action through protest, political parties, and the ballot box. The prevention of violent extremism may also require democracies to tolerate uncomfortable, even anti-democratic, ideas such as majoritarianism, sharia or separatism.

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THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT REMAINS A KEY PART IN PROMOTING THE DISENGAGEMENT OF VIOLENT RADICALS.

A military officer stands guard in the Most Affected Areas of Marawi, the Philippines.
© UNDP Asia-Pacific/ Mailee Osten-Tan

The 2018 'Pathways for Peace' report asserted that "preventing crises will do more to contain violent extremists than countering violent extremism will do to prevent crises".[1] This research paper examines the experience in South-East Asia over the last two decades and explores how peace and political processes have interacted with violent extremists.

AREAS OF INTEREST IN THIS RESEARCH*

PHILIPPINES

Mindanao

Aceh

Poso

Ambon

INDONESIA

Maluku

Timor-Leste

*The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations or UNDP concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The research looks at the interactions between those using extreme or terrorist violence and parties to political processes. Specifically, this paper studies the cases of conflicts in *Aceh, Ambon, Maluku*, and *Poso* in Indonesia, *Mindanao* in the Philippines and in *Timor-Leste* (then the Indonesian province of East Timor). Where a political process has played a role in constricting, mitigating or managing violent extremism, the paper focuses on the key turning points in the decision-making processes of those involved. Within these examples, it examines three concepts: (1) the decisions to disengage from violent extremism; (2) factors that promote resilience against extremists, and (3) strategic choices that have led to resistance or rejection of such groups and their ideologies.

Research on the disengagement of terrorists, radicals, gangs or cults has found that a change in context or environment is one of the steps to leaving behind a violent group. Disengagement is understood to be the process of an individual or group ceasing to use violence, leaving a movement or migrating to a non-violent role to achieve political goals. It is a change in behaviour rather than ideology.[2] Research on Indonesian jihadis has identified four factors that play a key role in disengagement:

(1) disillusionment with tactics and leaders;
(2) rational assessment that the rationale for violence has changed or the costs outweigh the benefits;
(3) the establishment of an alternative social network of family, friends and mentors; and
(4) a shift of priorities towards work and family life.[3]

Sometimes, the factors that stop someone from being a radical, terrorist or extremist are simplified into a binary of "push" and "pull". Push factors are those such as disillusionment with the group or estrangement from the network, while pull factors include having a change of heart towards one's enemy or greater consideration of one's family and friends.[4]

Long-time observers of Indonesia assert that the resolution of its regional ethno-religious conflicts was an important step in building its resilience to violent extremism. While violent extremism in Indonesia has not and may never be eradicated, it has been contained by more than just vigorous policing. The historical and environmental factors that have helped Indonesia prevent violent extremism include:

(1) it is a Muslim majority country;
(2) it does not have hostile neighbours;
(3) it is a democracy that allows public advocacy in favour of sharia;[5] and
(4) it has successfully resolved major ethnic and religious regional conflicts.[6]

Those who negotiated an end to ethno-nationalist insurgencies in Aceh in Indonesia, and Mindanao in the Philippines, identify strategic choices that were made to resist or reject the involvement of extremist groups, sometimes many years before their peaceful resolution. Indeed, negotiators saw a successful strategy in defining their struggle as local rather than global. A key element was the

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THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS INCREASINGLY DISENGAGED FROM PEACE PROCESSES AND GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS NORMS HAVE BEEN WEAKENED. THIS SITUATION LEADS TO THE PRIORITIZATION OF TOOLS OF COUNTER-TERRORISM RATHER THAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION.
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enlistment of international allies such a Western countries and human rights groups. Any association with transnational terrorist networks would have undermined these coalitions. For this reason, association with violent extremists was deemed contrary to the long-term interests of negotiating an end to their conflicts.[7] Unfortunately, current trends run contrary to this approach, even in the southern Philippines. The international community is increasingly disengaged from peace processes and global human rights norms have been weakened. This situation leads to the prioritization of tools of counter-terrorism rather than conflict resolution.

This paper is based on an extensive document review and more than 40 interviews conducted in South-East Asia during April 2019 with government officials past and present, peace negotiators, former terrorist and rebel group leaders as well as those from the non-governmental sector who study and monitor violence in the region. However, it has been more than 20 years since some of the examined conflicts began. Thus, there is extensive published material to draw upon, including books, academic papers, grey literature, media reports and first-person accounts. In some cases, these contemporaneous sources are more reliable and necessary reference points because direct participants in the conflicts have died or moved on to other work. Some interviewees said they no longer remembered in detail all the facts. A side effect of this extensive body of written knowledge is that direct participants in the conflicts suffer from "researcher fatigue" and many are no longer willing to talk to visiting foreign analysts.[8]

Finally, it should be noted that this paper is only one part of a larger project being conducted by UNDP on preventing violent extremism (PVE) in South-East Asia. It was guided by specific terms of reference after a division of labour by a team of re-searchers. It is intended to be narrowly focused on conflict, peace processes and violent extremism, and not a comprehensive review or assessment of PVE in the region or during this period. It does not, for example, examine in detail some relevant structural issues, such as decentralization or gun laws in Indonesia.

BISMILLAH

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THE SOUTH-EAST ASIAN EXPERIENCE SHOWS THAT THE TOOLS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION, SUPPORT FOR PEACE PROCESSES, RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, AND PEACEBUILDING ARE STILL CENTRAL TO AIDING THE PRESENT CHALLENGES OF PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM.

A jeepney heading for Esperanza, the Philippines.
"Bismillah" in Arabic means "in the name of Allah."
© UNDP Asia Pacific/ Alecs Ongcal

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CONFLICT CAN BE AN ENTRY POINT TO EXTREMISM AND TARGETED PREVENTION THAT DIFFERENTIATES BETWEEN INSURGENT AND EXTREMIST VIOLENCE IS IMPORTANT.

A stretch of rice paddy fields in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia
© UNDP Asia-Pacific/ Jefri Tarigan

CONFLICT CASE STUDIES

In the three countries, and over the 20-year period examined in this paper, violence has often been used to achieve political aims by governments and non-state actors. The conflicts in East Timor (now Timor-Leste), Aceh, Ambon, Northern Maluku, Poso and Mindanao, are examined below in roughly chronological order.

The first purpose of this section is to explain how each conflict started, its impact, key turning points, and how it ended. This includes a mapping of the political or peace processes. A second objective is to differentiate these conflicts by type. When it was convenient, governments were ready to label[9] or threaten to list[10] as terrorists the groups and movements involved in these conflicts. Each struggle is also unique and not always easily categorized. But how a government chooses to portray a conflict— as ethno-nationalist, inter-communal and extremist violence, or as terrorism—will influence its policy response.

The key distinction that guides this research paper is the difference between those willing to join a political process, especially a negotiated peace, and those who are not. The International Crisis Group (ICG) developed four characteristics for the Philippines context that can be used as a lens to examine all the cases below. These characteristics are the chosen targets of violence, negotiable goals, possession of political infrastructure, and control of population and territory. As ICG states:

> Terrorists deliberately and systematically target civilians in pursuit of non-negotiable goals, and score relatively low on the other two indices – reflecting their lack of legitimacy. Insurgent movements with negotiable demands, political infrastructure, popular constituencies and territorial control are less likely to depend on terrorist tactics and are more readily held to account for their actions, especially when engaged in peace processes.[11]

This categorization will have grey areas. Insurgents and terrorists, for example, can both rely on local communities for their support. This framework is a tool that should open up a discussion about a spectrum of policy options when formulating a government's response to violence. Put simply, making the above distinctions will help governments in determining which groups should be

included in discussions (insurgents with grievances) and which groups to reject outright (terrorists with unresolvable demands).

East Timor
—bombmakers, but not terrorists

The case of East Timor is a good example of how the above framework, created for the Philippines, can be more widely applied to distinguish between insurgents and terrorists.

After the Portuguese failed to prepare a decolonization process, the Timorese liberation movement, Fretilin, declared independence in East Timor in November 1975. Neighbouring Indonesia then invaded less than two weeks later. This led to a 24-year period of occupation and resistance that only ended with the negotiation of the 5 May Agreements in 1999 between Lisbon and Jakarta.[12] The agreement included a UN-sponsored referendum and, after a period of international supervision, the restoration of independence in May 2002.[13] Indonesia's invasion was illegal under international law; very few recognized its unilateral annexation of East Timor. During this time, Indonesia sometimes labelled the Timorese resistance as terrorists, particularly after a plot to build bombs by a cell known as the Black Brigade (*Brigada Negra*) was discovered.[14] An accidental explosion in September 1997 near Semarang, Central Java, led to the cell's exposure, the arrest of six of its members, and its leader seeking sanctuary in the Austrian embassy in Jakarta.[15] The cell was said to have been trained in how to make explosives by a bombmaker from the Irish Republican Army (IRA).[16]

In the rush to discredit the legitimate grievances of the Timorese, Indonesian authorities were willing to obfuscate the facts. They equated bomb-making with a particular type of violence, in this case terrorism. While no attack had taken place, they implied the targets may have been civilians. Lawyers for some of the six accused said their clients were subject to torture and it is unclear what actual evidence authorities had regarding targeting. The jailed leader of the Timorese political and armed resistance, Xanana Gusmão, was quick to take public responsibility for the operation. He stated that the explosive devices were being manufactured for use against the Indonesian military: "We never intended to use these bombs against civilian targets or to use them anywhere in Indonesia".[17]

In 1997, there was no political process offered to the Timorese by the Indonesians and no indication that the Suharto regime would change

its position. Archival documents confirm that the cell was part of the political infrastructure of the armed resistance FALINTIL, under the supreme command of Gusmão, and tasked with smuggling weapons back to East Timor.[18] While Indonesia did not negotiate directly with the Council for National Timorese Resistance (CNRT), the Portuguese government acted as its proxy in negotiating the 1999 agreement; Gusmão was moved to house arrest in Jakarta so that he could be indirectly involved in this political process.[19] In other words, applying the above criteria, the Timorese resistance and the Black Brigade formed an extra-territorial part of an insurgency and not a terrorist organization. The shift to bomb-making could be understood as innovation in the face of tactical frustration and a political stalemate. It was a low-cost, high-profile technique of asymmetrical warfare that, if used strategically, could have raised the global profile of the Timorese struggle for self-determination.

Aceh
—a liberation movement, not a terrorist organization

The history of the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or GAM) illustrates how a movement conscious of its success in the court of international public opinion in garnering Western sympathy can resist extremist networks.

While Aceh was part of the Republic of Indonesia from its inception, its pre-colonial history as an independent sultanate and its resistance to Dutch rule gave it a distinct identity. Acehnese efforts to maintain this identity put its people at odds, sometimes violently, with rule from Jakarta under President Sukarno. From 1951–1959, what was known as the Darul Islam (DI) rebellion came to an end through the negotiation of an agreement that conferred special status (*daerah istimewa*) on Aceh. A second insurgency by GAM under the leadership of Hasan di Tiro began in 1976; it was triggered by fraught centre-periphery relations, including the removal of the special status in all but name by President Suharto.[20]

GAM's armed resistance had three phases. First, from 1976–1979 it was a tightly knit and ideological organization. The resistance was crushed by the Indonesian army and its leaders went into exile, a new counter-insurgency operation known as DOM (*Daerah Operasi Militer* or Military Operations Zone) was waged by the Indonesian army against GAM between 1989-1998. GAM's military capacity was diminished by 1991 in a brutal campaign that saw more than 2,000 killed and thousands tortured. The movement only survived because

its leaders were already in exile, a significant number of military commanders found a safe haven in neighbouring Malaysia, and the repressive techniques of the Suharto regime created a whole new generation of GAM activists from the families of the victims and persecuted. After the fall of Suharto in 1998, GAM entered its third phase of armed guerrilla warfare until it negotiated a peace agreement in 2005.[21]

By the time the Government of Indonesia (GOI) came to negotiate the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with GAM, neither domestic nor international extremist groups were an issue.[22] As the Minister for Justice and Human Rights and Jakarta's chief negotiator, Hamid Awaludin stated: "I did not have any consideration about the extremism in Aceh. From the beginning, we always believed that Aceh was dominated by the GAM, and (they) had no other agenda, and there were no other actors."[23] The Helsinki MOU was made possible because both sides made major compromises. GAM abandoned its demand for independence, agreeing to demobilize and disarm its personnel, while the GOI conceded on several important issues, such as allowing local political parties, releasing political prisoners, and giving amnesty to GAM members.[24]

Importantly, while Islam was integral to GAM's ideology, it was not an important part of its struggle. According to Achenese activist and peace negotiator Munawar Liza Zaind: "Sharia was just candy. We wanted to have our future decided by a referendum". This decree was issued without a demand from, or consultation with, GAM and did not stop the conflict. Sharia was not discussed in Helsinki.[25] For that reason, this paper does not examine in detail the MOU or talks.

The turning point that led GAM to resist and reject international and domestic extremist groups was the decision years earlier to orientate its struggle outwardly to the international community. First, GAM had to adapt to the unipolar world at the end of the Cold War. It turned away from Third World revolutionism and anti-Westernism and saw its only real chance of obtaining independence was through international (mainly the United States and UN) support to pressure Indonesia. East Timor's independence in 1999 showed GAM that "human rights, democracy and referendum could be powerful tools of national liberation".[26] Tactically, GAM began to call for a referendum and UN-sponsored talks, and stepped up its operations to provoke a violent

overreaction by the Indonesian military.[27] Given the international community's present weak support for human rights and democracy, it is unclear whether such a strategy would work at this time.

MUNAWAR LIZA ZAINAL: ACEH WAS A STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION, NOT A JIHAD

"I remember in 2001, there were many [extremist] groups trying to come to Aceh, like Laskar Jihad and Mujahidin", recalls Munawar Liza Zainal, an Acehnese activist who represented his people at the peace negotiations that led to the 2005 Helsinki MOU. He continues: "They sent a message to the leadership of GAM to inform them that we will come to Aceh and we will fight side by side with you and we hope you will welcome us. Less than 24 hours later, the leadership of GAM issued a very strong statement: 'We are not fighting for this global agenda, but we are fighting to liberate ourselves and we want nothing to do with you. If you want to support our struggle, send us money and weapons, but don't send people and don't send your ideology'." Over the years, vigorous Indonesian diplomacy had isolated the Acehnese, separating them from what might have been 'natural' allies in the Middle East and among the decolonized countries in the Non-Aligned Movement. Instead, the Acehnese found stronger support for their cause among international human rights groups and elected officials in democratic countries, including in the United States Senate. They closely studied Timor-Leste's path to independence through an international diplomatic struggle at the United Nations. This gave GAM a pro-Western and international outlook that immunized them against transnational extremist movements. As Munawar, the Acehnese negotiator, remembers: "There was no link to the global agenda [of] the jihadists. It was only a struggle for liberation".

INTERVIEW WITH MUNAWAR LIZA ZAINAL, FORMER GAM NEGOTIATOR JAKARTA, 7 APRIL 2019

Links between Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Aceh date back to the DI rebellion in the 1950s. However, a split between the old DI leadership and GAM (founded by Hasan di Tiro), meant that in the third phase of rebellion after 1998, the insurgents were opposed by both JI and the Indonesian military.[28] After the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the declaration of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) by the United States, defining the struggle this way and seeking Western patronage meant unequivocally rejecting transnational groups like Al-Qaida (AQ) and its regional affiliates

such as JI. Like East Timor, "Aceh's supporters were in the United States Senate," recalled one GAM negotiator.[29] Keeping their independence also meant rejecting assistance from Indonesian domestic jihadis such as Laskar Jihad, including their offer to send jihadis. In a media statement, GAM rejected the Laskar Jihad's assertion that the struggle in Aceh was a religious war:

> Ever since the rule of the Sultanate of Aceh, the people of Aceh have been tolerant in the matter of religion and we are still living in peace and harmony with people of other religions. GAM cannot allow, and therefore opposes in the strongest terms, any attempt to radicalize the Muslims in Aceh by Laskar Jihad.[30]

In the case of Aceh, GAM, with its clear ethno-nationalist orientation and goal of negotiating its way to self-determination from a larger state, understood clearly that its self-interest rested in a strategy imbued with resistance to global, regional and national extremist networks.

HENDRI:
JIHADIS WEREN'T WELCOME IN ACEH

It began with a journey of religious discovery. "I was looking for a study group that taught the right ways of the Prophet Muhammad," said Hendri, originally from Aceh. He continued: "I wanted something deeper. I found this group went very deep and I started to form some very radical thoughts that thought of the government as infidels." While studying in Java, his quest for religious guidance took him to imprisoned terrorist and radical preacher Aman Abdurrahman, who led followers remotely from his West Java prison cell via phone calls and recordings. He stated: "Before I associated with Aman Abdurrahman, I didn't hate the government, but after I met him, I intensely hated the government. This is what made me think that I wanted to oppose the government." Returning to his home province, Hendri first associated with demobilized and disillusioned former combatants of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), but the interest of these veterans soon waned. Before too long, through connections he had made in Java, Hendri began to work with a group of veteran Indonesian jihadis working to set up a remote training camp. They wanted a quiet place to prepare to take their struggle to a new level beyond the bombing campaign they had waged in previous years elsewhere in Indonesia.

No longer welcome in the southern Philippines, the Indonesian extremists were looking for a new place to train. The jihadis also planned a new guerilla struggle back home. The idea was to prepare for future larger attacks on a government they regarded as run by infidels. According to Hendri "Our leaders wanted to lead a war against the government." As a province governed by sharia, the Salafi-inspired terrorists saw Aceh as friendly territory for such a scheme.

But these ideas were out of sync with the tides of peace in Indonesia. This was 2010 and in Aceh the people had started to share in the dividends of the Helsinki peace agreement. Former rebels had taken power in the province, the culmination of generations of fighting in a long running ethno-nationalist conflict. "The local people had high hopes for the new GAM government," Hendri recalled. Obsessed with secrecy, the jihadis did not share their plans with, or try to enlist, the support of local people. But the location they chose for training was not as isolated as they thought. The sound of gunfire disturbed the local population, who were still recovering from decades of war. They reported this, and the presence of strangers in the mountains, to authorities. About a month after the jihadis started training, Hendri was arrested in the raid by security forces that broke up the camp.
(*Author Interview, Hendri (Pseudonym) former Jihadi fighter*)

For JI veteran Nasir Abas, who set up training camps in Mindanao and Poso, the Hutan Jantho training camp was doomed to fail, as the group misunderstood the separatist and anti-outsider mindset of the Acehnese. "If you want to go an area for jihad you need the support of the local people. If the local people don't ask for your support, then you shouldn't go," he said
(*Nasir Abas, Jakarta, 3 April 2019*)

INTERVIEW WITH HENDRI (PSEUDONYM), A FORMER JIHADI

Maluku
—communal violence not separatism

The case of the Maluku shows how communal violence opens the door to extremists, but also illustrates some of the factors—peace processes, culture, local peacebuilding—that can contribute to people rejecting extremist violence.

A fight between a Muslim and Christian in Ambon City on 19 January 1999 on the Muslim holy day of *Idul Fitri* (Eid al-Fitr) triggered a communal conflict that quickly spread throughout the Maluku islands of Seram, Halmahera, Tidore, Ternate and Kei. By early 2002, more than 5,000 had been killed and one-third of the province's then 2.1 million population were displaced.[31]

Of Indonesia's communal conflicts, the National Violence Monitoring System (NVMS)[32] regarded the death and destruction in North Maluku (Halmahera, Tidore and Ternate) to have been the worst violence in Indonesia's early transition (1998–2003) with, by its estimate, 3,305 deaths, 2,717 injured and 15,460 buildings destroyed. Maluku (Ambon, Seram and Kei) followed, with 2,921 deaths, 5,597 injured and 14,039 buildings destroyed (see table opposite).[33] Academic literature on the post-Suharto democratic transition examines how the communal violence had momentum because it was driven by root causes, including the legacy of the authoritarian policies of Suharto's New Order government, violence as an assertion of identity, and as an expression of the struggle over local resources and political power.[34] The conflict was exacerbated by the Indonesian military, which then included the police, taking sides, selling weapons and ammunition, and running security rackets.[35]

Under the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid from October 1999 until July 2001, the government took a hands-off approach to regional conflict. In a reaction to the heavy-handed tactics of the New Order administration, the new president said the government should not get involved, as society had its own mechanisms to resolve conflict.
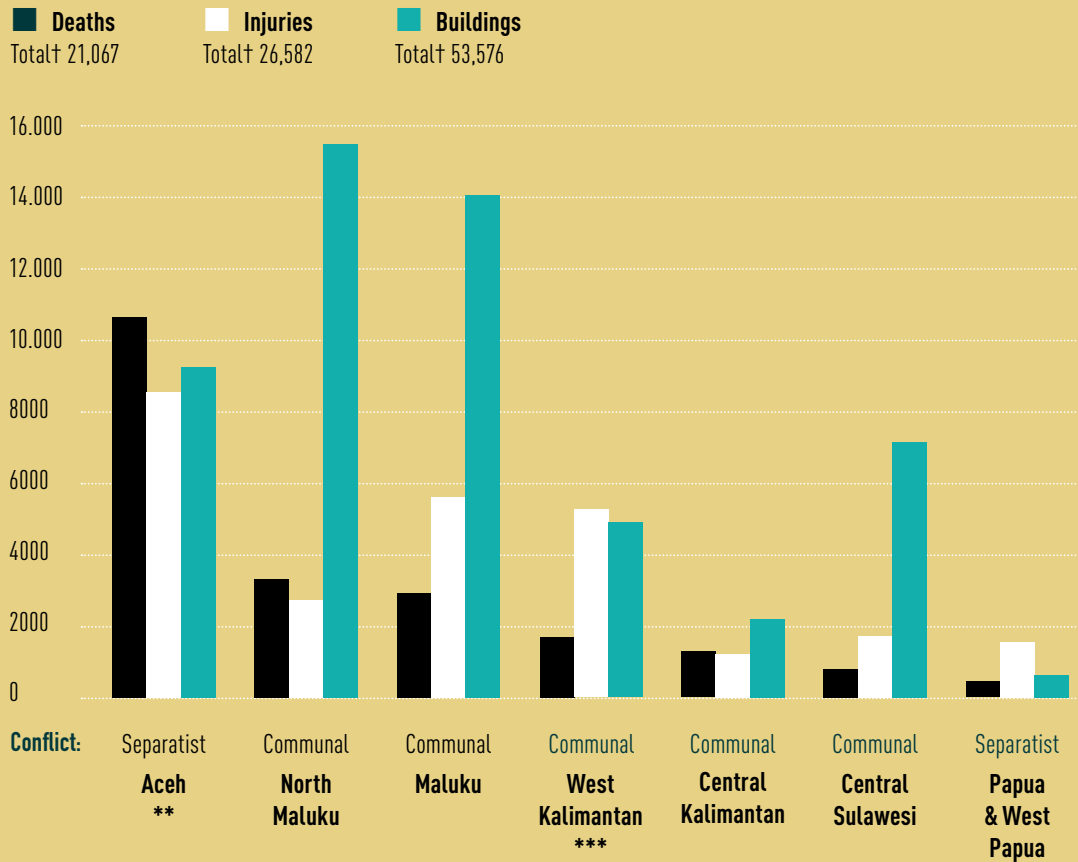
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THE KILLING WENT ON BECAUSE THE STATE WAS NOT THERE TO STOP IT. THIS WAS THE FIRST LESSON WE NEEDED TO LEARN.

As he observed: The killing went on because the state was not there to stop it. This was the first lesson we needed to learn. In any horizontal conflict, the state must be present. In this sense, the state was absent. As a result, both of the groups escalated the conflict conducted massacres, and people from outside the area came in, both Muslim and Christian, as they saw their fellow Christians and Muslims in Ambon killed by other people.[36]

The violence in Ambon quickly created an opening and became a rallying cry for jihad among extremists in Indonesia and beyond. First came the religiously-orientated humanitarian organizations, including KOMPAK (the Action Committee for Tackling the Consequences of the Crisis), originally set up in 1997 during the Asian Financial Crisis. When insecurity made it difficult to distribute aid, KOMPAK turned to the Javanese mujahidin groups for protection. Among this group were Afghan alumni of JI, and while the radical group's involvement as an organization was slow to start, this provided an early route for its members, while the leadership vacillated. When it came time to set up a training camp for what became known as Mujahidin KOMPAK, it was JI members that did this, although not in its name. The training camp became a magnet and gateway for

NATIONAL VIOLENCE MONITORING SYSTEM ESTIMATES OF EARLY TRANSITION VIOLENCE IN INDONESIA (1998–2003)*

■ **Deaths**
Total† 21,067

□ **Injuries**
Total† 26,582

■ **Buildings**
Total† 53,576

Conflict:

	Separatist **Aceh** **	Communal **North Maluku**	Communal **Maluku**	Communal **West Kalimantan** ***	Communal **Central Kalimantan**	Communal **Central Sulawesi**	Separatist **Papua & West Papua**

Aceh

West Kalimantan

Central Kalimantan

Central Sulawesi

North Maluku

Maluku

Papua & West Papua

INDONESIA

*The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations or UNDP concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. † The totals do not include estimated 1,485 – 1.585 deaths from East Timor (CAVR 2005). Data from NVMS. **Aceh figures cover 1998-2005; ***West Kalimantan figures cover 1997-2003;*

foreign jihadis. KOMPAK was also the entry point for Laskar Jihad, the last of the Javanese mujahidin groups to come to Ambon.[37] The presence of the jihadis, with their military training, access to recruits, resources, and weapons, added fuel to the conflict. They kept the conflict going in Ambon until 2005, years after the formal resolution of the communal split through the Moluccas Agreement in Malino (Malino II), signed in February 2002.[38]

The conflict in the Maluku had a number of complex strands. There was the derogatory labelling of Christians as "separatists" and Muslims as "terrorists" by those involved. This was pronounced in the so-called second phase of the conflict from mid-2000 after several thousands jihadis arrived in Ambon to support the Muslim community and oppose Christian forces. On the Christian side, there was the Forum Kedaulatan Maluku (Maluku Sovereignty Forum, or FKM). This group reportedly shared aspirations with the so-called Republik Maluku Selatan (Republic of South Maluku, or RMS), a South Malukan separatist group active in the late 1940s, during Indonesia's early independence. Unlike the more organized GAM in Aceh or the CNRT in East Timor, this new group represented a reemergence of RMS sympathies rather than a new and coherent push for independence.

Analysts noted that the separatist label given to the Christian groups was based on a perception of a historical connection to RMS, rather than an actual link to its old guard based in the Netherlands. Similarly, the term terrorist was applied to Muslims post-9/11. Other slurs were also used and based on cultural assumptions and stereotyping about the favourite foods of each religion: "dogs" for Christians and "goats" for Muslims.[39] When it came time to negotiate peace, the separatists and jihadis were both excluded from the talks and neither the causes of the RMS or the global terrorism agenda were on the table.[40]

The Malino II agreement was a turning, but not end, point in the conflict and violence in the Maluku. It marked the re-establishment of the authority of the central government in the regions. Specifically, it called for the security forces to act professionally by following the law impartially. The agreement mandated the disarmament of militias and expulsion of outside groups.[41] The deal allowed community-based peacebuilding that had been going on underground throughout the conflict to come out into the open. The social fabric and Malukan identity were said to be strong in Ambon and more resistant to outside influence.[42] However, it must

be recognized that a major cause of the communal conflict in the first place in Ambon and Poso, which will be discussed below, was a dilution of local identity caused by the influx of Muslim migrants that changed the demographic balance in both places and created new tensions. But also, as Schulze has more recently argued, the jihadi violence was less persistent in Ambon than in Poso and it was slower to start due to lengthy internal debates among jihadi groups, especially JI. This meant it was poorly organized and the groups present were divided on strategy and tactics. The lessons learned in Maluku from this after-action analysis were soon to be applied in Poso in Sulawesi.[43]

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...MANAGING AND MITIGATING ONGOING COMMUNAL TENSIONS IS STILL SEEN AS THE KEY TO KEEPING THE PROBLEM FROM BEING EXPLOITED AGAIN BY EXTREMIST GROUPS.

For participants in the Malino II process, the reasons why the violence tapered off depended on where they sat. For negotiators, it was the decisive leadership and patronage of Jusuf Kalla, who was said to have personally paid for the ship on which jihadis returned to Java.[44] For those on the ground, it was because Malukans of either religion were culturally closer to each other than those who had come from outside to fight on their behalf.[45] From the perspective of combatants, the fighting throughout the Maluku islands had sorted communities into Christians and Muslims.[46] In the Maluku, and in and around Ambon, in particular, the communal conflict opened the door for extremist violence. Resolving communal conflict was the first step to shutting out extremists. More than a decade after it started, managing and mitigating ongoing communal tensions is still seen as the key to keeping the problem from being exploited again by extremist groups.[47]

Poso —*an open door for extremists*
Poso is an example of how hard it can be to eradicate extremism once communal violence has provided the opening for extremists to become involved in a local conflict. Changing the environment with a peace agreement will only go so far; vigorous law enforcement is still required once militants and their ideology take hold.

Communal violence in Poso in Central Sulawesi was trigged earlier but flared later and persisted longer than the parallel conflict in Ambon. A Christmas Eve stabbing of a Muslim youth by a Christian in 1998 was the trigger, but the Poso jihad is said to have started in earnest after the May 2000 massacre by Christian militants at the Walisongo *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in which up to 191 were believed to have been killed.[48] It was a turning point as it was after this event that JI sought out local leader Haji

Adnan Arsal, a leader in the Tanah Runtuh neighbourhood, for his services. It is this community that gave the extremist group a foothold in the conflict.[49] "It's as though I was about to drown in the river and you've thrown me a piece of wood," said Haji Adnan of the arrival of the Darussalam Foundation from Surabaya, which he did not then know was JI.[50] While it had been slow to act in Ambon, JI saw this as an opportunity and exploited it.

Then JI leader Nasir Abas recalled that the organization saw Poso first as a training area; second, as a place to give its members experience of jihad; and third, to help Muslims in the conflict area.[51] Despite the size and political significance of the Walisongo massacre, the overall scale of the communal violence in Central Sulawesi was much less than in the Maluku. Between 1998 and 2003, the NVMS recorded only 789 deaths, 1,709 injured, and 7,144 buildings damaged or destroyed.[52]

Poso was the setting for the first Malino peace agreement forged in December 2001.[53] Key community figures like Haji Adnan, who were closely linked with the JI jihadis, were also involved in negotiating this peace agreement that shifted the nature of violence. After it was signed, the agreement was effective in stopping sectarian conflict.[54] Attacks on non-Muslims in the form of "mysterious shootings" and "bomb explosions" were blamed on "outside elements" that wanted to sabotage the peace process.[55] Between 2002 and 2007, these attacks targeted civilians and security forces, and included the infamous beheading of three schoolgirls in October 2005.[56]

The former head of Indonesia's Counter Terrorism police Tito Karnavian argued that the radicalization that drove the post-Malino violence can be explained by Louise Richardson's thesis of disaffected people (Poso locals), an enabling group (JI) and a legitimizing ideology (Salafi-Jihadism).[57] He noted that while most community members supported the agreement, militants—many of whom had not read it—perpetuated a widespread belief that it was biased against Muslims. This was ample fuel for persistent violence, and militants used this sense of injustice as an after-the-fact rationale for violence, claiming that not enough of the Christian ring leaders for the massacre had been prosecuted.[58]

For militants, the narrative mattered more than the truth. These perceived grievances were exploited by JI for its own larger goals, including developing Central Sulawesi as a safe base (*qoidah*

aminah). It was here they wanted to see sharia applied.[59] The peace agreement also inadvertently spread terrorist violence, as attacks were launched on those seen as responsible for the deal. The lead government negotiator, Jusuf Kalla, then the Coordinating Minister of People's Welfare, was said to have personally paid for some of these groups to return to Java.[60] For his role in forging these agreements, commercial properties he owned in Makassar in South Sulawesi became the target of terrorist attacks.[61]

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THE CASE OF POSO DEMONSTRATES HOW PEACE AGREEMENTS ON THEIR OWN ARE NOT CURE-ALLS...

The case of Poso demonstrates how peace agreements on their own are not cure-alls once violent extremists have taken hold. After a conflict opens up an area to extremists, they are difficult to eliminate. After they were deeply embedded in the community, a significant law enforcement effort was required to dislodge the Poso militants from the main towns.[62] To this day, small cells persist in the area, although they are much more marginalized and manageable than those groups active before the police raids of 2007.[63] Other analysts caution, however, that at the height of Santoso's influence around 2013 he may have had as many as 50 combatants which is probably more than JI ever mobilized at one time in Poso.[64] Militant groups that persist are no longer supported by the local people and are found in only small areas, but appear larger than they actually are thanks to their active online presence.[65]

An important postscript to the conflict in Poso occurred during the April 2019 Indonesian general election during which former extremists adopted peaceful political tactics to achieve their goals. The drivers of conflict in Poso were complex and influenced by perceived local, national and global struggles. At the local level the violence was communal, but at a national level it related to the struggle of urban Muslims and the rise of ethnic Bugis politicians. Laid over this was the international fight, where groups like JI and AQ saw the conflict as part of a global jihad by Muslims against Christians.[66] In the words of Nasir Abas, the former JI leader, it evolved from being a horizontal conflict (communal) to a vertical conflict (against the government). JI worked to educate and persuade the local people that the struggle should be about creating an Islamic state, adopting sharia, and making the region separate, or even independent, from the Indonesian state.[67]

This evolution took place after the Malino I agreement, but there has been a reversal in recent years, as Islamists have instead started to take advantage of the grey areas of Indonesia's political

system. "Democracy makes it possible that you can demonstrate for majoritarian purposes (such as sharia) even though it is not really democratic," said researcher Ihsan Ali-Fauzi.[68] In April 2019, the children of the prominent cleric Adnan Arsal, the so-called godfather of the Tanah Runtuh group, responsible for much of the Poso terrorist violence, ran for political office as members of parties led by former generals and Suharto family figures.

> Previously, they rejected democracy as "forbidden" *(haram)* because it reflected submission to a political system created by humans and not by God—kind of worship of false idols *(thaghut)*, in their terminology. Because of this, former Muslim militants considered the Indonesian government to be comprised of "infidels" *(kafir)*. But this time around, promises of improvement through the electoral process have tempted their faith.[69]

The case of Poso shows that pathways to disengagement from violence can emerge via political processes. This is not to deny the challenges that majoritarianism presents to Indonesia's national ideology of Pancasila, which stresses pluralism.[70] Sharia is seen as one threat by non-Muslim minorities. However, in Poso at least, former militants have disengaged from violence to engage instead with politics, even though their goal of Islamic governance remains. The role political parties can play in including former militants, and channelling their aspirations is worth noting, even though only one of the former militants who ran were elected to office.[71]

Mindanao
—playing the terrorist card in negotiation

During the long peace process in Mindanao, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) initially tolerated the presence of foreign extremists within their ranks, but the government, through political means, encouraged the group to reject them. This history lays out a route ahead to use the MILF and the Bangsamoro Transitional Authority (BTA) as partners in disengaging other armed groups from extremist networks.

The Moro people's struggle in the southern Philippines began in response to the arrival of Spain in the 1500s, continued during the American colonial period in the early 20th century, and carried through after the Philippines gained independence in 1946. The contemporary armed struggle began with the formation of the

Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), after then President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972. More fighters had foreign training, networked with leaders of national liberation movements in exile, and participated in the Afghanistan war against the Soviet Union. The peace process was started with the first agreement between the MNLF and the Government of the Philippines (GPH) made in Tripoli in 1976. With the fall of Marcos and return of democracy to the Philippines, it was the Ramos administration in 1996 that negotiated a peace agreement with the MNLF brokered by Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas that led to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1997. At the same time, the GPH started a separate track of peace negotiations with the MILF, which had splintered in 1984 from the MNLF. The MILF had broken from the MNLF as its leadership was more militant, faith-based, and at that time more uncompromising on the goal of independence.[72]

Since formal talks began in 1997, the basic principle guiding the MILF leadership was "that negotiated political settlement is the most civilized and practical way to solve the Moro problem."[73] The strategy was to talk *and* fight. "For me, these were two sides of the same coin. Without the armed units, there was no way to have peaceful negotiations. If there was no way for negotiations, then we would have had to have used armed jihad," recalled former MILF negotiator Abhoud Lingga[74]; he also noted that the MILF, and the MNLF before it, were inspired and defined by ideas of liberation not extremism. When using violence, they looked to conventional warfare rather than tactics of terrorism. "The MILF was not attracted to those groups and their methods," Abhoud said. This connection to the GPH across the negotiating table existed even before formal and public talks began, he said. The MILF was driven by deep historical grievances and they were ever keen to ensure their narrative was one of a long ethno-nationalist struggle, not that of a terrorist organization.

Self-defined as liberators and not terrorists, the MILF was sensitive to how others classified it. In 1997, the government allowed the US State Department to list the ASG as a Designated Terrorist Organization. After the Global War on Terror (GWOT) was declared after 9/11, the GPH used this tool as a stick against the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA) by not objecting to the US listing this group, too, as terrorists in 2002.[75] At the same time, the administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo opposed any US moves to list the MILF as a terrorist group. The

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"WITHOUT THE ARMED UNITS, THERE WAS NO WAY TO HAVE PEACEFUL NEGOTIATIONS. IF THERE WAS NO WAY FOR NEGOTIATIONS, THEN WE WOULD HAVE HAD TO HAVE USED ARMED JIHAD."

GPH was interested in exploring peace negotiations and used this policy position as a carrot to bring the group back to the table in early 2003.[76] Listing the MILF as a terrorist organization would have ended the peace process.[77]

The MILF's commitment to negotiate with the government framed its relationship with extremist groups. The MILF and its composite factions had many connections with international and regional terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida and JI. These relationships endured many years through studying, training and fighting together.[78] But the story worth recounting for this paper is why the MILF severed these ties and made the foreign jihadis unwelcome in Mindanao.

As the GPH-MILF negotiations advanced, the MILF's tolerance for foreign jihadi groups diminished. Foreign jihadis came to Mindanao through various routes and personal connections; they were not officially invited by the MILF. Former JI trainer Nasir Abas recalled how in 1993–1994, when JI was looking for a training camp, they first scouted locations in Rakhine State in Myanmar before deeming it too insecure and unsuitable for a permanent facility. They then settled on the southern Philippines as they were invited by Afghanistan veterans they knew. At the time, the MILF controlled more extensive territory in the area, which made it safer for trainees. As Nasir Abas noted, JI was a secret organization then and they did not tell their MILF hosts their name or larger goal of establishing sharia across the region. It was not until JI was being pursued after the 2002 Bali bombing that the presence in Mindanao of JI as an organization was widely revealed. Simultaneously, as GPH-MILF negotiations resumed, the government put pressure on the insurgents to expel foreign fighters. The incentive involved ensuring the MILF stayed off the terrorism watch list. This combination of factors increasingly restricted the activities of Indonesians and made them unwelcome in the well-organized MILF. They either returned home or moved to areas controlled by other groups such as the gang-like Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).[79]

The peace process lasted some 22 years, through the terms of five presidents and more than a dozen government peace negotiators, and resulted in more than 100 signed documents.[80] There were many disagreements along the way, including within the MILF. After the Philippines Supreme Court in 2008 rejected as unconstitutional the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD)[81] and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

"lacked the will" to sign it,[82] disgruntled commanders formed the breakaway Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), which held to the idea of independence.[83] The road to Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro will not be covered in detail in here.[84]

For the purposes of this report, there are two key issues to take away from the process. First, the MILF was committed to talks as a means to the specific political end of self-determination and was never tied to any religious or extremist ideology. This defined them for many years as insurgents not terrorists. Second, the "final" peace process created the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) that went into force in February 2019. It is currently led by the BTA, with MILF chair El Haj Murad as Chief Executive. Now that they constitute the regional government, the MILF and the BARMM should be regarded as partners in mitigating extremism and encouraging disengagement of other groups from the associating with extremist ideology. This was also the GPH's perspective in negotiating the peace deal. In the words of a former Philippines President, the Bangsamoro could "form a perimeter of vigilance against the spread of extremism".[85]

From the perspective of those involved in the political process on the ground, two things can now be done in Mindanao to prevent violent extremism through promoting an environment more conducive to peace. First is the suggestion to make the BARMM or the BTA work and provide an example to Muslims in Mindanao that peace processes can deliver results. The MILF is at the point of no return with this arrangement and there are no longer other political options on the table. Analysts see this as a key to reducing the appeal of Islamic State in the region.[86] Senior MILF members agree with this analysis, but, overwhelmed by the challenges of running the new regional government, also note the gap between people's high expectations and their administration's low capacities. The BTA needs to show quick results to a poor and war-ravaged people. This will be the strongest argument against the view that life would be better if the Bangsamoro were governed by the dictates of the Qur'an.

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THE HOPE IS THAT THE PEACE AGREEMENT DELIVERS ON ITS PROMISE...

As the BTA's Minister for Local Government noted: The hope is that the peace agreement delivers on its promise of answering and responding to the legitimate cause of the Bangsamoro. If it responds to that, then, in effect, you are able to address the legitimate causes and, if the legitimate causes are not there, the extremists will really be hard put to recruit people and resist.[87]

Second, give the MILF members of the new government an incentive to encourage splinter groups, such as the BIFF, and even ASG leaders, to come back into the fold. Analysts note that these groups split with the MILF at various stages of the peace process over positions taken by the government and compromises made by the MILF. Encouraging these talks would require the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to cease military operations against splinter groups with whom the MILF is in discussions.[88] The success of the BARMM would increase the chances these talks might deliver. Success with the two BIFF factions could then lead to progress with some in the ASG, especially Radullan Sahiron, who appears open to negotiations with the MILF.[89]

> *(The AFP)* have been trying to defeat the ASG for decades and it hasn't worked. They have been fighting the BIFF for more than a decade and haven't defeated them. These wars have failed. The GPH needs to give politics a chance. The MILF should be given a chance to show what they can do to negotiate with these groups. The commanders on the ground think the majority of them can be brought back to the MILF. They have to be included in the normalization and the amnesty program. A successful negotiation with factions of the BIFF might show others there is a way out.[90]

NAGUIB SINARIMBO: ADDRESSING LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES; UNDERMINING EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY

"Violent extremism as an ideology is difficult to sell. In a way, you need a legitimate cause to hide behind and this is my sense what is happening here. You have a legitimate national liberation movement that has been fighting the government for several decades. We have a moderate Muslim ideology here, essentially based on Shafi'i Islam. You find it in Indonesia and Malaysia and all of South-East Asia. You don't find people outright saying that we need to fight this government because it is a Catholic government or saying it is obligatory for Muslims to kill Christians. The hope is that the peace agreement delivers on its promise of answering and responding to the legitimate cause of the Bangsamoro. If it responds to that, and if the legitimate causes are not there, the extremists will really be hard put to recruit people and [they will] resist. I think that's the intersection between what the peace agreement and its implementation can bring to fighting violent extremism. It [removes] a legitimate grievance and exposes the real ideology. It cannot find resonance in the Bangsamoro."

INTERVIEW WITH NAGUIB SINARIMBO, MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT, BANGSAMORO TRANSITIONAL ADMINISTRATION, COTABATO CITY, 28 APRIL 2019

Residents of an evacuation center in Barangay Sagonsongan for those displaced due to the battle of Marawi, the Philippines.
© UNDP Asia-Pacific/ Alecs Ongcal

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THE HOPE IS THAT THE PEACE AGREEMENT DELIVERS ON ITS PROMISE OF ANSWERING AND RESPONDING TO THE LEGITIMATE CAUSE OF THE BANGSAMORO.

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**WHEN ISIS CAME HERE,
THEY APPROACHED
ME, BUT I DIDN'T GIVE
THEM THE ASSURANCES
THAT I WILL JOIN THEM
STRAIGHT AWAY.**

ODIN

Odin
© UNDP Asia-Pacific/ Alecs Ongcal

THIS IS ODIN'S STORY

ISIS said that if they got what they wanted, there would be peace. If they were given power, there would be peace. If they would lead us and control the government, there would be peace.

We've grown up in a conflict area in Mindanao, and many of the people here are tired of war.

I am a farmer in Lanao del Sur. When I was younger I only finished elementary schooling because my family couldn't afford for me to keep attending and we had financial problems. Everyone knows that you can't get a good job if you don't finish school.

In farming, sometimes we earn, and sometimes we don't. When disaster strikes, our crops die and with it our livelihood. ISIS offered us money, and we joined them with the belief that our lives would become comfortable.

We soon realized that we had joined a war. We went to Marawi, and I was there during the climax of the siege. It's sad to think of those buildings destroyed.

It was never in our minds to destroy the city. During the shootings, anyone would be afraid. I thought, I won't get anything from this, just death. I had my mother and family living in Marawi. My relatives were calling me and asking, why did you do this? Why did you join this kind of life? Our relatives told us to surrender, because they will be the ones to suffer. Parents, siblings, and relatives are really important.

After one month, I surrendered. I was afraid once I left ISIS. We asked for amnesty, and initially the government made a lot of promises. We told them what we wanted – help and better economic opportunities - but until now, they haven't fulfilled those wishes. How can we change our lives without capital?

We are really poor. If we had money, we wouldn't be asking for help. If you have money, you won't do anything bad.

A man rides a buffalo in Mindanao.
© UNDP Asia-Pacific/ Alecs Ongcal

Lanao Del Sur remains a largely agricultural area.
© UNDP Asia-Pacific/Alecs Ongcal

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THERE MAY WELL BE EXTREMISTS AMONGST INSURGENTS, BUT THIS ASSOCIATION DOES NOT MAKE ALL INSURGENTS TERRORISTS.

A man sits outside the Krue Se Mosque, Thailand, the site of insurgency-related attack in Pattani, Thailand in 2004.
© UNDP Asia-Pacific/ Mailee Osten-Tan

These case studies from recent history in South-East Asia bring into relief patterns of how conflict opens the door for extremists, and how political processes can close that door by creating favourable environments for disengagement, resilience and resistance to extremists and their ideology.

Conflict can be an entry point for extremism

As they were in Ambon and Poso, communal conflicts are a magnet for extremist groups and a clarion call for their recruitment. Conflict undermines societal cohesion that is an important factor in creating resilience to extremism. In Maluku and Ambon, extremists were not present until after communal conflicts produced horrific crimes and persecution of co-religionists that led to their peers coming from elsewhere in Indonesia to not only defend their faith but exploit the opportunity to advance their own cause on these new battlegrounds. In the southern Philippines, the large area of territory controlled by the MILF was attractive to Indonesian jihadis looking for a safe base for training.

Conflicts defined as ethno-nationalist can resist extremist groups

In East Timor and Aceh, tightly defined ethno-nationalist struggles, which were also being waged on diplomatic fronts around the world, saw strategic advantage in not having globally discredited extremist groups in their midst. Around 2003, the MILF came to the same conclusion. The revitalized insurgency in the southern border provinces of Thailand, which came back to life in 2004, seems to have drawn the same lesson. Despite more than a decade of governments, commentators and analysts searching, no actual evidence of a connection between the insurgents and global or regional extremist groups has emerged.[91] Association with extremist global ideology and terrorist networks is clearly deleterious for an ethno-nationalist struggle that seeks international diplomatic legitimacy. For government negotiators, so-called carrots should be used deftly to discourage insurgents from associating with extremist groups. While governments are often quick to call ethno-nationalist insurgents terrorists,[92] it is important to distinguish between the use of particular violent tactics and political goals. Insurgents need to be given a strategic reason to resist or reject extremists.

Distinguishing between insurgency and jihad remains important

More than semantics, having a subtle understanding allows the prioritization of political tools rather than force when resolving violence. As the example of the MILF in the southern Philippines has shown, the periodic excessive use of state force prolonged the political resolution of that conflict. Labelling insurgents as terrorists does not aid resolution of these conflicts. This evidence suggests that the GPH would do well to now employ the same "insurgency lens" applied in the past to the MILF to understand factions within the BIFF and ASG.

Violence is used by both sides as a negotiating tactic

The South-East Asian experience concerning insurgent groups indicates that they require military power to be taken seriously. Small wars are politics waged by other means. In East Timor, ongoing armed resistance on the island gave standing for those fighting on the diplomatic front abroad. If it were not well-armed and able to resist the Philippines military, the MILF would have been regarded as a pushover at the negotiating table.[93] On the government side, the South-East Asian experience is that military power has never been able to quash a political movement with a legitimate grievance. As Aceh shows, if defeated on the battlefield, such rebels lay low before rising again in the next generation. If insurgency violence works as a tool to apply political pressure and maintain the international profile of a cause, government engagement can show that peace also works to these ends. The long peace process in the southern Philippines underlines the importance of keeping political channels open and having mechanisms to minimize harm to civilians.

The grievances of those unhappy with peace agreements can be exploited by extremists

As Poso demonstrates, perceptions about the unfairness and injustice of the Malino I agreement were exploited by JI militants. In Aceh in 2010, jihadis thought—wrongly—that they might tap into the ranks of disgruntled GAM fighters when setting up their training camp. In the southern Philippines, foreign fighters and the ideology of IS have persisted in groups of disaffected or former MILF and MNLF insurgents. In a post-peace agreement environment, understanding the grievances of the disgruntled is critical. In these cases, restraining the excessive use of force by the military and police is important to avoid inadvertently driving wavering groups back into the extremists' camp.

Insurgency and extremist violence do coexist

Insurgencies exist in diverse communities with different ethnic groups and clans. They are dispersed and comprise semi-autonomous groups with divergent tactics. In efforts to engage groups or disengage combatants, the South-East Asian experience points to the importance of understanding factions and differentiating responses based on that, rather than homogenizing groups. There may well be extremists among insurgents, but this association does not make all insurgents terrorists.

Protracted peace processes are frustrating but can provide immunity against extremism

The successful peace processes of South-East Asia were long, with many setbacks before coming to fruition. In the case of GAM in Aceh from 1998–2005 and the MILF in Mindanao from 2005–2019, the possibility of a future deal meant that the insurgents policed themselves and minimized the role for regional and global extremists in their areas of operations. While there has been diminishing appetite in the international community for conflict prevention and a recent emphasis on countering and preventing violent extremism, an ongoing peace process with international engagement could be seen as a strong preventative factor in keeping out extremism. During difficult periods, maintaining momentum, keeping back channels open, and not listing parties to the negotiations as terrorist groups are all important lessons from South-East Asia.

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MANAGING AND WORKING TO RESOLVE THESE CONFLICTS IS ONE FACTOR THAT CAN AID THE DISENGAGEMENT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISTS.

Resolving conflicts politically aids disengagement

Managing and working to resolve these conflicts is one factor that can aid the disengagement of violent extremists. After conflicts are resolved, economic activity is another factor that can help disengagement. Conflict resolution allows community-based peacebuilding to take place, such as in Ambon. After a peace agreement, the atmosphere improves for political inclusion; inclusive political systems encourage engagement rather than violence. In Aceh, a key part of bringing GAM into the political system was the flexibility to allow local political parties. This gave its community supporters a stake in the political system. In Poso, former militants have become local activists for national political parties. In Mindanao, the MILF has its United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP). In the Bangsamoro, a future challenge and test for inclusiveness will be for the party of liberation to tolerate local rivals. This could include allowing a party to be formed and advocate for independence, which would be anathema not only to the MILF but the GPH as well.[94]

These findings lead to recommendations that can be divided into environmental factors and centripetal forces. The tools are still important in dealing with the new challenges.

Creating environments that resist violent extremism

>> ### Conflict prevention

Conflict prevention should be understood as a tool that prevents violent extremists. Preventing conflict denies extremists the opportunity to exploit vulnerable communities, including by presenting their ideology and tactics as a solution to a conflict or grievance. Systems that support early warning and intervention contribute to preventing violent extremism. Such targeted prevention[95] could include work supporting respect for human rights, especially in preventing abuses by governments, as well as promoting policing and other security interventions that are fair, even-handed and legal.

>> ### Conflict resolution

Conflict opens doors for extremists. When it happens, local and international resources should be mobilized quickly to resolve it. Crisis management can include mediation support, monitoring or a peace operation. Legitimate grievances need to be recognized and both sides involved to have these addressed. Governments often resist international monitoring but giving parties to an armed conflict a sense that they are being watched promotes behaviour more in line with international norms. Monitoring can encourage insurgents engaged in negotiations to distance themselves from extremists.

>> ### Peacebuilding

Preventing the relapse of conflict will restrict opportunities for violent extremists to exploit discord in communities. Public opinion research that keeps a close watch on evolving community attitudes to violence and violent actors is important. Understanding the narratives of the disgruntled in post-peace agreement communities, communicating with these communities to counter extremist narratives, and designing interventions to address their legitimate grievances can all contribute to preventing a relapse into conflict and violent extremism.

>> Successful transitions

As in the Bangsamoro, promoting successful transitions after the signing of an agreement is another way to counter the narratives of extremists. Making new governments work, improving their ability to deliver on peace agreements and providing services all contribute to countering spoilers and extremists who have a vested interest in the failure of peace accords. The GPH and international community should not only support the BTA to deliver services but also to implement those parts of the underlying agreements that reinforce the BARMM's territorial integrity, such as enforcing fishing rights, and recognizing its unique identity as a self-governed region.

Strengthening the centripetal forces of prevention

>> Talking not fighting

Not all extremist and insurgent groups are immediately included in or welcoming of peace agreements. Rather than dub them as extremists or list them as terrorists, the encouragement of dialogue is one way to counter extremism. The use of their former comrades-in-arms, now included in political processes, as go-betweens can be one way to operationalize this. The insurgencies of South-East Asia and the persistence of terrorism in Indonesia demonstrate that the government's use of excessive deadly force in violation of human rights norms does not resolve conflict sustainably.

>> Disengagement

Disengagement and the renouncing of violence as a tactic is a more realistic goal than deradicalization. The South-East Asian experience shows that disengagement is possible without deradicalization. Encouraging militants to renounce violence and participate in political processes is a key intermediate step.

>> Providing political options

Political options should be offered to militants and extremists. Inclusive governance and effective political parties are two types of universal prevention. Flexibility regarding political party representations, having low thresholds for the creation and participation of parties, and allowing registered parties to peacefully advocate controversial subjects, such as sharia and independence, opens up options other than extremist violence for those groups with legitimate grievances and definable political goals.

Mother and her child at a local community centre in Pattani, Thailand.
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1. United Nations, World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, DC., World Bank, 2018), p. 22. There is no single accepted definition of extremism or violent extremism. This paper uses a definition in the 2018 J. M. Berger book *Extremism* from the MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series that sees extremist groups as basing their very survival on violent opposition to an out-group. By this definition, states can also be extremist.

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3. Ibid., p.8.

4. Ihsan Ali-Fauzi in Ihsan Ali-Fauzi and Dyah Ayu Kartika, eds., *Step Out of Extremism: Eight Stories of "Hijrah" From Violence to Peacebuilding* (Jakarta,Center for the Study of Religion and Democracy (PUSAD), 2018), pp. 1–2.

5. For the purposes of this paper, the definition used is a broad one: the law based on the Qur'an, the Sunna and Arabic tradition, upheld by Muslims; Islamic law. Available at www.macquariedictionary.com.au.

6. Interview with Sidney Jones, Director, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, Jakarta, April 2019.

7. Interviews with Munawar Liza, GAM negotiator, Jakarta, April 2019, Nur Djuli, GAM negotiator, Banda Aceh, April 2019, and Abhoud Lingga, MILF negotiator, Cotabato City, April 2019.

8. Personal communication with Julie Chernov Hwang, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Goucher College, March 2019.

9. M. N. Davies, *Indonesia's War over Aceh: Last Stand on Mecca's Porch* (New York, Routledge, 2006), pp. 228–229.

10. See, for example, N. M. Morada, "The Philippines: Security Context and Challenges", Third Europe-Southeast Asia Forum, Berlin, 13–14 December 2004, p. 2.

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14. Matthew N. Davies, *Indonesia's War over Aceh: Last Stand on Mecca's Porch*, (New York, Routledge, 2006), p. 228.

15. "Timorese charged with explosive offences", *Tapol Bulletin*, No. 144, December 1997, p. 3.

16. Interview with Wilson Bin Nurtiyas, former Solidaritas Mahasiswa Indonesia untuk Demokrasi (SMID) activist, Jakarta, April 2019. Also personal communications with former Australian military intelligence officer, December 2012.

17. "Timorese charged with explosive offences", *Tapol Bulletin*, No. 144, December 1997, p. 4.

18. Letters from Nino Konis Santana to Shalar Khosi (Avelino Coelho da Silva), Chief of the FALINTIL Council, 22 January 1997. Letter from Shalar Kosi to Konis Santana, 24 May 1997. Available at http://casacomum.org/cc/pesqArquivo.php?termo=%22Shalar+Kosi+%22. For a list of code names, see also J. Mattoso, *A Dignidade: Konis Santana e a Resistencia Timorense*. Temas e Debates (Lisbon, 2005), pp. 24-26.

19. *United Nations and East Timor*, pp. 6–7.

20. K. E. Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization.* Policy Studies 2. East-West Center. Washington, DC; East-West Center, 2004), pp. 1–2.

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35. Cunliffe and others, *Negotiating Peace,* p. 11.

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37. Schulze. "From Ambon to Poso", pp. 42–46.

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51. Interview with Nasir Abas, Jakarta, April 2019.

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54. Karnavian, *Explaining Islamist Insurgencies,* p. 90.

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56. Karnavian. *Explaining Islamist Insurgencies*, pp. 93–96. For a full account of this period in Indonesian history, see Tito Karnavian, *Indonesian Top Secret: Membongkar Konflik Poso*, (Jakarta, Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2008). It was unrealistic to interview Karnavian as part of this research since in April 2019—when national elections were underway—he was Chief of the Indonesian National Police.

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64. Sidney Jones, personal communication, 25 June 2019.

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67. Interview with Nasir Abas, Jakarta, April 2019.

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74. Interview with Abhoud Syed M. Lingga, former MILF negotiator, Cotabato City, April 2019.

75. See Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, U.S. State Department. Available at https://www.state.gov.

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77. Interview with Abhoud Syed M. Lingga.

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79. Interview with Nasir Abas, former head of JI Mantiqi III, Jakarta, April 2019.

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84. "The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro", Manila, 27 March 2014. Available at https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PH_140327_ComprehensiveAgreementBangsamoro.pdf.

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86. Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, *The Jolo Bombing and the Legacy of ISIS in the Philippines*. Report No. 54 (2019) p. 12.

87. Interview with Naguib Sinarimbo, Minister for Local Government, Bangsamoro Transititonal Authority, Cotabato City, April 2019.

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90. Ibid.

91. See International Crisis Group, Southern *Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*. Asia Report No. 98 (2005) and Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace. Asia Report No. 291 (2017).

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KEY TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT (GLOSSARY)

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): Programs, projects of activities designed to actively counter violent extremism ideas and/or activities.

Counterterrorism (CT): Actions, often implemented by security forces, to actively counter known terrorist groups.

Disengagement: Disengagement is understood to be the process of an individual or group ceasing to use violence, leaving a movement or migrating to a non-violent role to achieve political goals.

Extremism: A belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group.

Hate Speech: Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.

Insurgents: Localized armed groups using violence to achieve specific negotiable goals that have their own political infrastructure as well as the control of population and territory.

Majoritarianism: Majoritarian politics promotes the idea that the majority — be it ethnic, racial or religious — is somehow threatened by minorities, even when they are mostly disadvantaged or already restricted in their access to public goods by law.

Preventing Violent Extremism: Programs, projects of activities designed to prevent violent extremism ideology taking route or activities taking off.

Radicalization: The process by which people are converted to radical ideas, such as those held by violent extremisms.

Terrorism: Terrorism, as used in this paper, refers to the use of indiscriminate violence, likely targeting civilians. It refers only to a behaviour or an act; it does not indicate the nature of the group or individuals responsible.

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