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Jean-Louis Denis: Belgian Jihadist Caught Speeding in Benin

Jacob Zenn

On January 30, 49-year old Belgian citizen Jean-Louis Denis was arrested in Tourou, Benin for speeding while driving his car. After additional investigation, however, the Beninese authorities ordered his "immediate" deportation due to his background in Belgium, where he had previously been convicted for recruiting youths to fight for Islamic State (IS) and other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. This deportation occurred several days later and the "speeding" stop may, in fact, have served as a cover for a more targeted terrorism prevention operation ([7sur7.be](https://www.7sur7.be), February 7).

Denis responded to his deportation by posting a YouTube video in which he claimed that the Beninese authorities told him: "You want Sharia. You recruited, you came [to Benin] for that." However, Denis denied those allegations and asserted that the Beninese authorities had become "paranoid" by information shared about him from Belgian intelligence officers. According to him, it would have been

"insane" to travel to Benin to recruit for jihadist groups.

Indeed, on his website, Denis noted he planned to "leave for *hijra* (migration) and establish an eco-Muslim village." He further detailed his desire to support the development of agriculture based on the principles of sustainable development. As for Benin, he claimed that the reason why he chose that country was because "land is cheap there, and people speak French and the country may be Christian, but people are tolerant" ([sudinfo.be](https://www.sudinfo.be), February 5).

In 2016, Denis was sentenced to ten years in prison for recruiting Muslims in Belgium to fight for IS in Syria and Iraq ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com), June 3, 2016). He, therefore, helped Belgium earn the dubious honor of "exporting" more of its own citizens to fight in Iraq and Syria than any other country in the West ([politico.eu](https://www.politico.eu), April 1, 2016). Beginning in September 2012—one year into the Syrian Civil War—Denis began to use his food bank, "Resto du Tawhid," to recruit fighters. Alongside distributing meals to the needy, Resto du Tawhid, according to the court that sentenced him, became an avenue for Denis to discuss jihad with young men. At least 11 of these

youths later left Belgium for the battlefields of Syria.

By September 2016, Denis complained to a Belgian court that he had been in solitary confinement and missed the birth of his son (brusselstimes.com, September 30, 2016). Denis had indeed been sentenced to the ten-year prison term; this was longer than sentences for other jihadist recruiters in the country, likely because he had recruited several minors (vrt.be, January 29, 2016). Ultimately, Belgian authorities released him from prison early, in 2019; Denis was sure to point out that he still had not abandoned his Salafist views (katehon.com, January 20, 2020).

The region where Denis was pulled over in Benin has come under pressure from jihadist attacks in the past year (rfi.fr, February 11, 2022). While Denis denies he was recruiting for jihad, the Beninese authorities seemed to at least suspect that his Salafist doctrine would make the region's youths more susceptible to recruitment by either Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) or its al-Qaeda-affiliated rival, Group for Supports of Islam and Muslims (JNIM). If their suspicions are correct, it would indicate that Denis was replicating his previous model in a new country where, like Belgium in 2011, jihadism is on the rise.

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The Death of Daud Muzammil and ISKP's Assassination Campaign Against the Afghan Taliban

Abdul Sayed

Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), which operates in Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan, assassinated senior Afghan Taliban commander Daud Muzammil in a suicide attack on March 9 ([Twitter.com/@Abdsayed](https://twitter.com/Abdsayed)). This attack

was ISKP's most significant blow to the Afghan Taliban since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. Muzammil was a top-ranking Taliban commander and was a trusted military assistant of the Taliban Supreme Leader Sheikh Hibat Ullah Akhonzada, who belongs to the same Noorzai clan as Muzammil did ([Amu](#), March 11). Akhonzada appointed him as governor of Nangarhar and Balkh, which are strategically important provinces, with the goal of crushing the Taliban's armed opponents there after they took over. He then served as deputy interior minister for security for eight months last year.

As a result of these roles in the Taliban, Muzammil was a high-ranked target for ISKP in Afghanistan. He also inflicted heavy losses on ISKP in its traditional stronghold in Nangarhar, playing a leading role in ISKP's territorial defeat there in 2019. On top of this, Muzammil broke up the ISKP attack network in that province after the Taliban's takeover in 2021.

ISKP celebrated Muzammil's assassination as a major victory against the Taliban in a 20 minute video released on March 14 ([Al-Azaim Media Foundation](#), March 14). ISKP described his killing as revenge for the deaths inflicted by Muzammil on ISKP in Nangarhar. Further, ISKP warned of future assassinations of key Taliban commanders. Beyond this, Muzammil was designated by the US as a terrorist for being a key Taliban actor close to Iran ([US Department of Treasury](#), October 23, 2018). IS likewise declared his assassination a blow to Iran's assets in Afghanistan. [1]

A Deep Dive into Daud Muzammil

Daud Muzammil hailed from the Greeshak district in southern Helmand province, and was a prominent Taliban commander since its emergence in the early 1990s. During that period, he fought against the Taliban's rivals in northern Afghanistan. The pro-US militia of the Afghan warlord Abdul Rasheed Dostum, therefore, arrested him with hundreds of Taliban fighters from

northern Afghanistan after the Taliban regime collapsed in October 2001. [2]

Muzammil rejoined the Taliban insurgency after his release from prison by Dostum's fighters. He then launched a devastating series of attacks against the British-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops in his native province and surrounding areas with the support of al-Qaeda and foreign fighters from Pakistan and elsewhere. Accordingly, Muzammil was one of the Taliban commanders known for close relations with al-Qaeda during the insurgency, and al-Qaeda promoted him as a formidable Taliban commander in its publications. [3]

Muzammil eventually obtained key roles in the Taliban's central military leadership when Akhunzada became the Taliban Supreme Leader in 2015. He served as shadow governor for different provinces, including Helmand and Farah, and then was appointed leader of the Taliban's Quetta military council. In that role, he oversaw the insurgency in Afghanistan's southern provinces ([Amu](#), March 11).

Countering ISKP

When the Taliban exhausted its military power removing ISKP from Tora Bora, Akhunzada sent Muzammil to support another key commander, Peer Agha, in defeating ISKP in Nangarhar. Later, Muzammil led the Taliban's victory against ISKP, which ended ISKP's seemingly unbreakable five-year territorial hold in Nangarhar ([Afghan Analyst](#), March 1, 2020). The ISKP territorial collapse in Nangarhar was celebrated as an overall defeat of ISKP in Afghanistan.

Similarly, Muzammil ruthlessly defeated the remaining cells of ISKP's attack network in Nangarhar after August 2021. ISKP launched an intense hit-and-run attack campaign against the Taliban from Nangarhar on September 18, 2021. ISKP carried out around half of its 135 attacks post-Taliban takeover in 2021 in Nangarhar alone. [4] However, Muzammil quickly

dismantled the ISKP network with brutal measures against the group, killing anyone suspected of supporting ISKP ([Amu](#), March 11). He was, therefore, announced as governor of Nangarhar on September 20, immediately after ISKP launched several attacks ([Twitter.com/@Abdsayedd](#)). As a result, ISKP attacks were reduced significantly by January 2022, carrying out only two. Instances of ISKP attacks dropped from 183 in 2021 to 23 in 2022. [5] Having successfully accomplished his mission in Nangarhar, Muzammil was appointed as deputy interior minister for security by Akhunzada in February 2022 ([Twitter.com/@MJalal0093](#)).

Muzammil served eight months as a deputy minister of the interior until Akhunzada deployed him against ISKP and other armed opponents of the Taliban in northern Afghanistan as governor of the Balkh province. Balkh is a critical strategic Afghan province with borders with three Central Asian countries: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. This evidenced the respect Akhunzada had for Muzammil's fighting and leadership abilities.

Conclusion

ISKP shifted their strategy towards high-profile assassinations in 2022. This trend began with the assassination of senior Taliban religious leader Rahim Ullah Haqqani on August 11, 2022 ([Dawn](#), August 11, 2022). Haqqani was an extreme anti-ISKP figure who excommunicated ISKP supporters and declared death as the only punishment for them ([Terrorism Monitor](#), November 20, 2021). The second high-profile ISKP assassination was—though ISKP did not claim it—another prominent Afghan religious leader, Mujib ur-Rehman Ansari, who was known for his strong support for the Taliban; to that point, Ansari justified the death penalty on any opponent of the Taliban ([Khama](#), September 2, 2022). Similarly, the ISKP assassination of the Taliban's head of security for northern Badakhshan province, Abdul Haq Umar, occurred through a

tactical car bomb attack in December 2022 ([Ariana News](#), December 26, 2022).

ISKP's al-Azaim Media Foundation issued a five-page statement in Pashto on March 6, warning of revenge attacks against Taliban key commanders for the losses inflicted upon ISKP supporters and members under Taliban rule. It was only a matter of time before Muzammil would be targeted ([Al-Azaim Media Foundation](#), March 6). The ISKP statement noted that the Taliban should not misconstrue silence from ISKP as indicative of the group's death, suggesting instead that it would soon return to deal massive blows to the Taliban. The same message was repeated in the al-Azaim Media video, (after the assassination of Muzammil) threatening more attacks against the Taliban leaders to come. Muzammil's death is, therefore, likely a harbinger of future ISKP assassination attempts on major Taliban leaders.

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Notes:

[1] "Two blows to the Iranian regime: Assassination of 'the governor of Balkh' and bombing 'al-Tibyan center,'" *Al-Naba* weekly magazine, Issue 382, p. 8-9.

[2] Author interviews with various sources including Taliban and former government security officials, conducted online on various occasions in September-October 2021.

[3] See, for example, The al-Qaeda Urdu flagship *Nawai Afghan Jihad* magazine interview with Daud Muzammil, May 2012, "The enemy has completely failed and lost hope: An interview with the Imarat-e-Islamis deputy in Hilmand, Haji Daud Muzammil," *Nawai Afghan Jihad*, Volume 5, Issue 5, p. 32-28.

[4] Author's dataset of ISKP attacks based on the official claims of IS's *al-Naba* weekly magazine.

[5] Ibid.

The Curious Case of Ahmed Muaz: How Islamist Groups Coopt Criminal Gangs to Advance Radicalism in the Maldives

Animesh Roul

In mid-December 2022, the Maldivian Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances (DDCom) submitted its final report on the disappearance of a prominent progressive journalist, Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla. Almost eight years after Rilwan mysteriously vanished from the capital Male's suburb of Hulhumale in August 2014, the investigating agencies have connected several missing dots to reveal how he was harassed, abducted, tortured, and decapitated ([Sun](#), December 15, 2022). The commission also found that Rilwan's assassination was directly linked with his fellow friend, blogger, and social media activist Yameen Rasheed's death in 2017.

The Maldives Police Service (MPS) arrested three prime suspects, Ahmed Muaz, Ismail Abdul Raheem, and Ahmed Ismail, for "aiding and abetting the act of terrorism" in the country on June 26, 2022. Formal charges were brought against them at the Criminal Court of the Maldives on August 1, 2022. The charge sheet noted their role in the abduction and murder of Rilwan in August 2014, and the fatal attack on Yameen in April 2017 ([PSM News](#), August 1, 2022; [Dhiyares News](#) (Dhivehi), Sep 26, 2022). This profile examines the role of Ahmed Muaz in particular, who was a radicalized gang leader that has been behind violent attacks, kidnappings, and killings of pro-democracy bloggers, journalists, and rights activists in Maldives. This issue has gained a certain amount of

importance, given that 40 gangs are active in the Maldives, and there have been 32 deaths in the country due to gang violence over the past 15 years ([Times of Addu](#), September 12, 2022).

Muaz and Gangs of Maldives

Muaz is around 40 years old and is a resident of Male. In 2011, he was arrested for the first time for burglary and other petty offences ([Sun Online](#), April 21, 2011). Not long after this, he became an integral part of the Maldivian underworld and led a street gang called “Bosnia.” Several other violent criminal groups were also operating—and closely cooperating—in the Maldives, including Kuda Henveiru, Dot, and Buru.

Before 2013, the Maldivian crime scene was replete with drugs, weapons, and murder. However, the strain of Islamism that began taking root in the country’s mosques and prisons played a significant role in influencing gang members to target secular, progressive individuals who supported religious tolerance in the Maldives. As Daniel Bosley, former editor of *Minivan News*, mentioned, “gang members use extreme religious ideologies as a thin veneer of credibility to [add to] what seems [an] otherwise unremarkable profession.” These criminal gangs also helped recruit fighters for al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), November 21, 2014). Since early 2014, the Maldives witnessed a spike in targeted violence against so-called “anti-Islamic” or irreligious people, or what they call “*laadheenees*” (in Dhivehi, the language of the Maldives).

Radicalization and Targeted Killings

In Rilwan’s case, he received a death threat from Abu Dujana al-Maldifi (real name: Yameen Naem), who was the leader of the Maldivian contingent fighting alongside Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria in May 2014. Muaz reportedly told police during the interrogation that his group identified Rilwan after he disparaged Islam and the

Prophet Muhammad through his speeches and writings. It remains unclear if Muaz had orders from Abu Dujana al-Mualdifi to abduct Rilwan and kill him. However, the DDCom report suggested there may have been an al-Qaeda link to the whole episode ([Maldives Independent](#), September 8, 2019). Two other well-known Islamist associates of Muaz were arrested. This includes Ahmed Ismail, who facilitated travel for fellow Islamists to join the Syrian war, and Ismail Abdul Raheem, who once attempted to travel to Syria through the Turkish border in 2015. He had also been affiliated with a jihadist group operating near the Furukan mosque in Male, according to DDCom ([Avas](#), June 26, 2022).

In June 2014, months before the abduction and killing of Rilwan, Muaz, and his fellow gang members, including Ahmed Ismail and Arlif Rauf, abducted and tortured several people. The goal had been to find out the identities of administrators of social media groups that advocated “anti-Islamic” ideals, such as secularism, homosexuality, and atheism in the Maldives. They also asked the abductees to recite the “Shahada” (profession of faith) to test their belief in Islam ([Minivan Archive](#), June 9, 2014). Before Rilwan’s abduction, Maldivian police had even received intelligence inputs that Muaz and Ahmed Ismail were planning to drown two “secularists” ([Maldives Independent](#), September 8, 2019). At that time, however, no action was taken ([Daily Panic](#), June 10, 2014).

In September 2014, Muaz again figured prominently in a private investigating agency’s report commissioned by the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN). The report focused on the disappearance of Rilwan along with several fellow radicalized gang members, including several who travelled to Syria in the name of jihad ([Edition](#), December 16, 2022). [1] Muaz also vandalized the independent *Minivan News* office in Male ([YouTube](#), September 25, 2014). Several pro-democracy institutions and media outlets, including

Minivan News and Raajje TV, received threatening phone calls from Muaz and his fellow gang members. Gang members delivered the news organizations death threats and a warning not to publish anything about Muaz, his arrest, or another incident; Muaz was apparently interrogated by the police regarding his destruction of a closed-circuit security camera at the *Minivan News* office, where he also left a machete as an implied threat of further actions.

Both media outlets were also threatened with arson by unidentified gang members. One of the messages circulating on social media stated: "If you write the name [Muaz] we will wipe you out. Remember that." Another similar message from Muaz himself read: "You will be killed or disappear next, be careful" ([Twitter/fazyahmed](#), September 25, 2014). Pictures of Maldivian Democracy Network's Shahindha Ismail and lawyer Mushfiq Mohamed were further circulated on Facebook with a message stating: "These two need to be disappeared" ([Minivan Archive](#), September 23, 2014). As Muaz's name and picture, along with others, were widely circulating on social media pages, especially on Facebook and Twitter, Muaz and fellow gang members reportedly abducted and assaulted the administrators of a popular Facebook page "Ranreendhoo Maldives" ([Minivan Archive](#), November 13, 2014).

Islamism under Political Patronage

The Maldivian administration under former president Abdulla Yameen was often accused of Islamist appeasement while throttling pro-democratic and secular expression. Media reports during his tenure suggested that he and his ministers were colluding with local gangsters to intimidate and silence political opposition and independent voices ([Maldives Independent](#), July 3, 2018; [Raajje](#), October 12, 2018). It was also reported that Ahmed Muaz was contracted by the government and given a list of 1500 names to

intimidate or eliminate ([opendemocracy.net](#), August 26, 2014).

Muaz held multiple meetings with former Home Minister Umar Naseer and Islamic Affairs Minister Mohamed Shaheem Ali, where they discussed their concerns about the rise of secularist movements in the Maldives, which they believed threatened the country's Islamic values ([Twitter/@Ibbe4787](#), October 31, 2018). It is possible that during these meetings, Muaz and his associates received encouragement to carry out a coordinated campaign against anyone who supported democracy and secularism. Muaz and his followers were even observed publicly participating in government-sponsored activities, such as motorcycle rallies and sporting events as late as 2018. For example, Muaz attended official events with former President Abdullah Yameen—including as part of his presidential campaign—which suggested a mutual understanding and implicit political support between Yameen and the gangs ([Times of Addu](#), December 15, 2022; [Raajje](#), December 16, 2022).

As Rilwan's case investigation was hitting a deadlock due to government apathy, Muaz and fellow gang members killed Rilwan's friend and blogger, Yameen Rasheed for "insulting Islam" in April 2017 ([Maldives Independent](#), May 10, 2017). The DDCom investigation not only blamed Muaz and gang members for Yameen Rasheed's murder, but also linked their involvement to several previous knife or machete attacks. Among those attacks was the fatal killing of moderate legislator Afrashim Ali in early October 2012 ([Edition](#), January 10, 2020).

Conclusion

Gang members who target progressive intellectuals in the Maldives—those who disrupt peace marches or attack protest rallies that support freedom of religion and secularism—are often recruited and trained by groups active around the Noor and Furqan mosques ([Twitter/DDCom](#),

December 3, 2019). Muaz became central to this growing alliance between gangs and religious radicals. As one former Male-based journalist stated, “criminals like Muaz who are already desensitized to violence and have a firm grounding in Islam are more likely to dominate the extremist universe in [the] Maldives.” [2] While providing muscle power to pro-Islamist political elites who once sought to increase their influence against secular and democratic forces in the Maldives, Muaz, along with his fellow gang members, were instrumental in the intimidation, abduction, and the killing of people who disparage Islam. Radicalized gang leaders associated with Islamist groups, such as Muaz, therefore, pose a threat to democratic and secular values in the Maldives and undermine the rule of law.

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Notes:

[1] Maldivian Democracy Network, “Findings of the Report on the Disappearance of Maldivian Journalist Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla”, September 22, 2014.

<https://maldivesindependent.com/files/2015/03/Findings-of-the-Report-on-the-Disappearance-of-Maldivian-Journalist-Ahmed-Rilwan-English-Version.pdf>

[2] Authors Interview with a Maldivian journalist in exile, February 10, 2023.

The Deradicalization of Indonesian Jihadist Ali Fauzi

Irma Rahim

In a speech on radicalization, terrorism, and deradicalization at a workshop with the Indonesian National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), Ali Fauzi, the youngest brother of three of the 2002 Bali bombers,

once stated: “Everyone has the right to become a better person” ([ITS News](#), August 2, 2022). Imam Samudera, another Bali bomber, as well as Fauzi’s brothers, Ali Imron, Amrosi, and Ali Ghufron (Mukhlas) were all sentenced to death and eventually executed in 2008 (with the exception of Ali Imron, who remained in prison) ([ABC News](#), August 17, 2017; [CNN Indonesia](#), June 22, 2018). Following his brothers’ trials, Fauzi completed a PhD in Islamic Studies *cum laude* at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang on January 17, 2023. His dissertation found that terrorist inmates are unlikely to completely abandon their doctrine and ideology if prison deradicalization programs fail to include a sufficient component of religious moderation ([ITS News](#), January 18, 2023; [ITS News](#), January, 20, 2023; [Beritajatim](#), January 27, 2023).

Further, Fauzi noted that his PhD would only make him a better person if it helped him guide others to pledge loyalty to Indonesia and abandon their involvement in terrorist acts, accepting religious moderation and the Islamic concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* (“providing grace to all mankind and the world”) ([Rri](#), January 17, 2023; [Beritajatim](#), January 28). This includes radicalized members of Fauzi’s friends and family, to whom he dedicated his thesis ([KOMPAS](#), January 20). His arguments were unsurprisingly supported by the BNPT chairman, who stated that, unlike Fauzi, at least 80 percent of former terrorist inmates remain steadfast in their ideology ([CNN Indonesia](#), February, 14).

Who is Ali Fauzi?

Ali Fauzi served a three-year sentence from 2006 to 2009 for charges of terrorism, having supplied components for explosive devices used in an attack on the Polda Metro Jaya (Indonesia Police Metro Jaya) in Jakarta ([ABC News](#), August 17, 2017; [AIDA](#), April, 2020). While Fauzi himself had no role in the 2002 Bali bombing, the event opened the eyes of Indonesian authorities to the dangers of returning Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) militants, such as Fauzi,

Hambali, Umar Patek, Doktor Azhari, and Imam Samudera. Militants such as these completed their military training either at al-Qaeda's Kandahar-based camps in Afghanistan or the Moro Liberation Islamic Front's (MILF) camps in the Philippines. As a result of Fauzi's foreign training, he was consequently included on a police "red notice" in the aftermath of the devastating 2002 bombing in Bali ([Ngopibareng](#), March 7, 2018).

Fauzi's radicalization began in 1991 at Lukmanul Hakim Islamic School in Johor Baru, Malaysia, where he worked as a language instructor. He relocated to Johor Baru after receiving an invitation letter from Ali Ghufron to assist with running the school, and later he swore his allegiance to Indonesia's first jihadist movement—Negara Islam Indonesia (Islamic State of Indonesia, or NII). However, Fauzi eventually pledged his allegiance to JI in 1994 after Abu Bakar Ba'asyir separated from NII and created JI. After joining JI, he was chosen to join Ba'asyir's military camp on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. ([Ngopibareng](#), March 7, 2018). At this camp, Fauzi aided the MILF in its fight against the Philippine government, while also receiving training in firearms, guerrilla warfare tactics, and bomb-making during his time there in 1994.

In addition, while Fauzi was in Mindanao, he helped establish and instruct at a new military camp called "Hudaibiyah." In 1997, after completing his training with the MILF, he lived in Kuala Lumpur and interacted with Hambali, who was the military commander of JI's Malaysian component, as well as Imam Samudera. After the fall of Indonesian President Suharto in 1998, Fauzi returned home and was appointed as JI's bomb instructor for province of East Java. Later, during the 1999-2002 conflict in Poso and Ambon, he moved to those regions to instruct others in bomb-making and other military matters. This required him to travel every three months between Desa Tenggulum, Lamongan, and Ambon or Poso where he carried weapons and up to 500 kilograms of potassium chlorate (a

raw material used to assemble bombs) ([Ngopibareng](#), March 7, 2018).

Fauzi only learned about the 2002 Bali bombing while on a ship from Ambon to Surabaya, but knew by the type of bomb used that the attack was performed by someone with similar training as his. After being listed on the police "red notice," Fauzi escaped to the "Hudaibiyah" camp in Mindanao through Sabah, Malaysia, where he reunited with Umar Patek. ([Tempo](#), March 30, 2011). In 2005, Fauzi and other militants established another military camp further inside the jungles of Mindanao. The establishment of this new military training camp led to Fauzi's capture by the Philippine military, after Fauzi and several other militants with various allegiances were discovered ([Ngopibareng](#), March 7, 2018). By the time he was detained, Fauzi had already trained approximately 3,000 combatants ([Pojoksatu](#), May 17, 2018).

Fauzi's Imprisonment and Release

In 2006, Fauzi and 20 other JI members were extradited to Jakarta, where they were investigated to determine their involvement in the 2002 Bali bombing. In 2008, the Indonesian Police issued a release letter, clearing their names and concluding that they were not involved in the Bali bombing ([Ngopibareng](#), March 7, 2018). Given that he had spent the better part of two decades training others to conduct terrorist acts, Fauzi was still sentenced to three years of prison ([ABC News](#), August 17, 2017).

After his release from prison, Fauzi continued down the path of deradicalization. In 2009, he returned to his hometown, Desa Tenggulum, to teach at the Islamic school owned by his family—Pondok Pesantren Al-Islam ([Ngopibareng](#), March 7, 2018). Fauzi eventually began assisting the BNPT deradicalization program as a speaker in BNPT workshops and a mentor for the former inmates charged with terrorism ([Detik](#), April 11, 2017; [Detik](#), March 29, 2017). The workshops focused on deradicalizing

terrorists and educating the public about the dangers of extremism. In 2017, the BNPT began to cooperate with Fauzi's Yayasan Lingkar Perdamaian (YLP, or The Circle of Peace Foundation) in Desa Tenggulun as a deradicalization and education center outside of the prison system ([Detik](#), March 29, 2017).

Fauzi has transformed Desa Tenggulun, which was once known as the epicenter of terrorism in Indonesia, into an education hub for children, widows, and women whose husbands are still imprisoned for terrorist acts ([Muhammadiyah Studies](#), November 13, 2017). Furthermore, YLP became a temporary home for terrorist who were not yet ready to fully reintegrate with society. At times, Fauzi would even pick up former inmates upon their release and shelter them in his compound ([ANTARA News](#), May 4, 2019; [BBC](#), February 20, 2020). According to YLP, the center aims to reaffirm former terrorists' loyalty to Indonesia, empower former combatants through training in life skills, and offer educational scholarships to the children of convicts and widows whose husbands were imprisoned on charges of terrorism ([Beritajatim](#), January 27).

Fauzi's Deradicalization Doctrine

In assisting the BNPT deradicalization program, during his speeches at BNPT workshops, Fauzi always shared not only his own experiences of radicalization, but also the four elements of the deradicalization process, a path he began down in 2007 ([Ngopibareng](#), March 7, 2018; [AIDA](#), September 12, 2017). The four elements include scholar Marc Sageman's philosophy of friendship and kinship, the humanistic approach of the Indonesian police, continuing education in Islamic Studies, and meeting the victims and their families ([AIDA](#), October 4, 2021). In his speaking engagements, Fauzi always apologizes and asks forgiveness for both what his friends and family did in Bali in 2002 and for what his former students did in the years since, as bombings became more frequent in Indonesia ([merdeka](#),

February 15, 2016; [Tempo](#), October 11, 2012; [KOMPAS](#), October 13, 2022; [BBC](#), February 20, 2020). More recently, during his doctoral commencement speech on February 21, 2023, Fauzi again apologized to the victims and families of the 2002 Bali bombing, as well as to the society that had given him a second chance ([merdeka](#), February 21; [ngopibareng](#), February 21; [Tempo](#), February 21).

Further, as a deradicalization mentor for former terrorists, Fauzi believes that the deradicalization program at BNPT has successfully altered the lives of those such as Umar Patek, who was released on December 7, 2022, and Ahmad Ulul Albab, who was released on January 30 ([Beritasatu](#), May 3, 2019; [KOMPAS](#), December 7, 2022; [SURYA](#), January 30). When Patek was released on December 7, 2022, Fauzi guaranteed that he had transformed not "by 100 percent, but by 1,000 percent" after more than eight years in a prison deradicalization program ([KOMPAS](#), December 14, 2022). Fauzi acknowledged, however, that some people were still not convinced that deradicalization could persuade former terrorists to abandon their radical ideology ([CNN Indonesia](#), February 14). To push against this, Fauzi promised that he himself would return to prison if Patek broke parole and returned to terrorism ([CNN Indonesia](#), December 16, 2022).

Fauzi's Turning Points

For Fauzi, there were three turning points in his life that led to his deradicalization. First, in 2011, he met the victims of the 2009 JW Marriott bombing for the first time and witnessed the physical and mental scars on those left behind while he was completing his master's thesis on terrorism in Indonesia ([KOMPAS](#), February, 22, 2020; [AIDA](#), October 4, 2021). Education, he said, opened his eyes to the reality of the heinousness of what he and his jihadists were doing ([Beritajatim](#), January 27).

Second, in 2013, he sent his oldest son to an Islamic boarding school which belonged to his friend, who had graduated from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. He wanted his son to be a “mujahid,” not a terrorist. Furthermore, he encouraged his son not to discriminate in forming friendships with Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah (other Islamic Indonesian religious organizations), and non-Muslims ([Tribunnews](#), June 6, 2013).

Third, on November 6, 2016, he reached out to Buya Syafii, the former Chairman of Muhammadiyah—whom he regarded almost as a father—and asked to allow himself to continue his education with funding from the charitable organization, requesting “permission, if there is an opportunity for ex-terrorists to receive scholarships...” Fauzi continued by stating that he was the only recipient of a scholarship that allowed him to pursue an MA in Islamic Studies at the Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya, from which he graduated in 2011. After Syafii forwarded Fauzi’s message to the chairman of BNPT, Fauzi and the chairman engaged in a series of meetings. The scholarship request was eventually granted as a part of his deradicalization program ([Republika](#), July 22, 2017; [Nusantara](#), July 22, 2017). Fauzi funded his PhD in Islamic Studies himself, which he began in 2019 ([Terakota](#), October 31, 2019).

Conclusion

Fauzi’s case demonstrates the benefits of Indonesia’s “soft approach” deradicalization programs, with a particular emphasis on religious moderation. Fauzi hopes his YLP will grow into an entrepreneurship-oriented Islamic boarding school in the future ([ngopibareng](#), March, 4, 2018). In this way, Fauzi may use his knowledge and teaching skills to help former terrorists inmates and their families ([UMM News](#), January 18; [KOMPAS](#), January 20).

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