'Brothers: A profile of the three brothers behind the 2002 Bali bombings'

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I'm going to talk to you today about three brothers from Indonesia who formed the core of the Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist cell that carried out the bombings in Bali in October 2002, in which 202 people were killed.

The brothers names are Muklas, Amrozi and Ali Imron. (*slide 1*) And they make a very good case study because they illustrate a series of key factors which are common among the Indonesians who have turned to violent jihad, some of them peculiar to Indonesia, some not.

The factors that I identify are:

- social and family connections
- exposure to an inspiring mentor
- radical Islamic schooling
- a personal affinity with the history of the jihad
- and direct involvement in sectarian conflict, which transforms the concept of jihad into real-life experience.

The oldest of the brothers is Muklas (*slide 2*) who is now 46. His given name was Ali Gufron ,but Muklas is the alias he is best known by. In this photograph he looks quite mad, which he is not. A fanatic, yes, but not mad.

Muklas is a very serious and scholarly man, an Islamic teacher who became a senior figure in JI and was the "spiritual leader" of the Bali bombers. It was his role to constantly reassure them that what they were doing was sanctioned by God.

He said later: "The advice I gave them was that they needed to remain sincere and constant in carrying out acts of devotion including jihad or holy struggle."

The second brother is this one, Amrozi (*slide 3*) whom the newspapers called the "smiling assassin". This photograph was taken the moment after he was sentenced to death.

Amrozi is a high-school dropout who said later that the feeling *he* had after helping carry out the bombings was just like when you finally get the girl you've been chasing. Amrozi was basically the gofer; he bought the car and the chemicals and helped out with preparations.

The youngest of the three brothers is Ali Imron (*slide 4*) who's now 36.

Ali Imron had a critical role. He was the guy who drove the van packed with a tonne of explosives to the spot just around the corner from Bali's nightclub strip, and briefed the two suicide bombers who would complete the journey and flick the switches. He also delivered a small bomb to the US consulate in Denpasar, as a calling card so the United States would know it was intended as the main target.

Ali Imron was the only one of the brothers to repent and apologise after the event. He was rewarded for his remorse with the lesser sentence of life in prison, while his brothers were sentenced to death.

The brothers come from a village (*slide 5 - map*) called Tenggulun in eastern Java. It's quite small (*slide 6*) with a population of about 2000 and three mosques. The main street is a strip of dirt with pigs and chickens foraging around in the open drains that run alongside of it. Most of the people are farmers.

The brothers' family was relatively fortunate. This is their home (*slide 7*) which is quite comfortable by rural Indonesian standards.

Their father was a man called Nur Hasyim who was the village leader for 30 years. (*slide 8*) When this photo was taken during my visit to Tenggulun in January 2003 he'd been paralysed by a stroke. He has since passed away. But in his prime he was a respected authority and a disciplinarian.

Nur Hasyim had 13 children including seven boys. His middle son Muklas (*slide 2*) was his pride and joy. He was a tall, lanky boy who was always smiling. He kept a herd of pet goats which he cared for lovingly. He told an interviewer once that he loved his goats because they were just like humans; "some were cute, some were nasty and some were just scoundrels". Muklas was a diligent student. Every day after regular school he would attend Islamic classes at the local religious school where he memorised the Koran.

Amrozi *(slide 3)* was a very different story. Amrozi was his mother's pet but the black sheep of the family; a wild, mischievous boy who was always playing pranks and always in trouble at school. Amrozi idolised his brother Muklas.

The youngest of the three, Ali Imron *(slide 4)* was the baby of the family, a skinny little kid who was always trying to keep up with his big brothers.

Ali Imron was more like Muklas than Amrozi, a very serious boy. He was also in awe of Muklas and highly disapproved of Amrozi and his antics.

The boys had a strict Islamic upbringing. Their grandparents on both sides had been Islamic teachers. One of their great-grandfathers had set up the first Islamic school in the village. He was quite a legendary figure according to Muklas. His name was Kyai Haji Sulaiman and he used to gallop around the village on horseback with a sword, wearing long robes and a headdress that Muklas said looked 'just like Ali Baba's'.

Muklas claimed his great-grandfather made the haj pilgrimage to Mecca seven times, an amazing feat back in the 1920s. Each time he would stay in Saudi Arabia for a year, and return to preach the Wahhabist view of Islam in Tenggulun. *(slide 9)*

Not everyone in the village would have approved of this rigid strand of Islam being imported from the Middle East. Traditionally the style of Islam practised in Indonesia has been quite relaxed and pluralistic, a kind of hybrid infused with bits of Buddhism and Hinduism and traditional mystical beliefs. There has been a real struggle between these rival strains of Islam for the hearts and minds of Indonesians.

The brothers' father, Nur Hasyim, was brought up on the Middle Eastern influenced brand of Islam. He was raised exclusively in religious schools and was "very fanatical with his beliefs", according to Muklas.

Nur Hasyim was a veteran of Indonesia's bloody war of independence against the Dutch in the 1940s which ended with the creation of the Indonesian republic in 1949. Nur Hasyim fought in that war and one of his brothers died in it. Muklas later related story of how his father had witnessed his brother, Muklas's uncle, being shot dead by Dutch soldiers.

Muklas said later “it was these kinds of stories that inspired me and my younger brothers to be mujahideen”.

And that quote from Muklas says a great deal about how he and his cohorts see their struggle – as just the latest episode in a battle that’s been going on for more than half a century.

I want to talk a little more about that history – before coming back to the three brothers. Indonesians still hold bitter memories about the colonial era. They’re a very proud and nationalistic people and they still bristle at any hint of colonial attitudes or foreign interference, as Australia found when it intervened to help win independence for East Timor.

And in Indonesia, nationalism and Islam are very closely intertwined. Islamic groups played a major role in the fight for independence. A muslim militia called Hizbollah, which was set up by the Japanese during world war 2, fought against the Dutch, as did other Islamic groups.

To them the fight against invasion and oppression – for freedom and for independence – was a battle waged in the name of Islam.

When Indonesia *won* its independence there was a large rump who believed the new republic should be an Islamic state. Remember that 90% of the population are Muslims, making up the largest Muslim population in the world. Islamic groups had fought for independence and in the first elections they would win 40% of the vote.

To them an Islamic state seemed a legitimate and just aspiration and a logical outcome.

The new president Sukarno initially agreed to enshrine Islamic law in the constitution, but then abandoned that promise and Indonesia was made a secular state. For the Islamists this was a travesty and a betrayal – and they never forgave it.

The upshot of this was that one of the leading Islamists of the time rebelled and established his own Islamic State of Indonesia. SM Kartosuwiryo was a charismatic former military commander from the old Hizbollah militia which he had re-fashioned into the Indonesian Islamic Army.

Kartosuwiryo now declared: "We must eliminate all infidels and atheism until they are annihilated and the God-granted state is established in Indonesia - or (we must) die as martyrs in a holy war." This was in 1949.

Kartosuwiryo's Islamic state of Indonesia survived for 13 years. It had its own army, police force and elements of a civil administration. It covered much of West Java and later spread to other parts of Indonesia. Kartosuwiryo called his territory "Dar Ul Islam" – the Abode of Islam.

20,000 people were killed in this insurgency, which only ended when Kartosuwiryo was captured & executed in 1962 and his rebellion was crushed.

The concept of "Darul Islam" was crushed as well, or so the Indonesian authorities thought. In fact it was not. It survived and later flourished underground, and the dream of restoring the Islamic state lived on for generations of young Indonesians.

The brothers – Muklas, Amrozi and Ali Imron – would have grown up on the much-embellished folklore of the Islamic state of Indonesia; the tales of the bravado and martyrdom of Kartosuwiryo and the glories of fighting and dying for Islam.

The enemy had changed, from the Dutch to Sukarno and later Suharto, but the battle, as they saw it, was the same: a battle for Islam.

It seems now the brothers were destined to join that struggle. Amrozi told an interviewer, "My father wanted his children to be warriors". And that must have been very empowering, for three boys in a

small remote village, to see themselves as part of such an historic and time-honored struggle.

Muklas was the one who always seemed most likely to live up to his father's hopes.After finishing school he studied to be teacher, but he couldn't stand the loose-living ways of his fellow students. He called them "a wicked lot", "adulterers and drinkers", and said that only "God almighty gave him the strength to resist" these temptations. Muklas tells a story of how once, to torment him, his classmates hired a prostitute and locked Muklas in a room with her; as Muklas tells it, he just sat there for two hours; he said "Allah kept me safe".

Amrozi, by contrast, seemed an unlikely holy warrior. By his teens he'd become a delinquent. He used to steal things from his family and sell them at school, until he was expelled. He wore long hair and rode a big motorbike. He married, but divorced after two years and lost custody of his child. For fun Amrozi would go to the local cemetery and vandalise graves by setting fire to them and sometimes defecating on them. He was apparently inspired by the purist views of his father who believed that the Javanese practice of grave worship was un-Islamic.

Amrozi said: "I guess it's fair to say that I liked it when I could make other people upset".

A psychiatric report after the Bali bombings found that Amrozi was "simple and rather shallow". It reported: "Personality immature - tends to be impulsive and easily influenced by others he respects or is in awe of - and very obsessive." The person he was in awe of Muklas, but he could never win his revered sibling's approval. Young Ali Imron complained often about Amrozi's reprobate behavior. He thought Amrozi was a disgrace to the family and said often that he "didn't want to be another Amrozi".

A crucial turning point for the brothers came when Muklas was sent to the Al-Mukmin Islamic boarding school in the village of Ngruki – (*slide10 – map*) in Solo, Central Java, about a 200 km bus ride from Tenggulun.

The Ngruki school was founded by the two men who would later form Jemaah Islamiyah; two clerics (*slide 11*) – Abdullah Sunkgar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. Ba'asyir and Sungkar were followers of the Darul Islam movement who had made it their life's work to carry on Kartosuwiryo's campaign for an Islamic state.

(slide 12) Ba'asyir's philosophy on Islamic education was spelt out in a speech he made in 2000 in which he said:

"Religious boarding schools are the bulwarks of Islam… The formation of students must be directed towards nurturing their spirit and zeal… In order for a pesantren to truly be a crucible for the formation of cadres of mujahideen, the school must be kept free of all influence of secular thinking and worldly sciences… We must nurture both comprehension of and zeal for jihad, so that love for it and for martyrdom grow in the soul of the mujahideen."

Back in the '70s Ba'asyir and Sungkar were not yet advocating violence. They were outspoken critics of Suharto; they refused to fly the Indonesian flag and urged their followers to boycott elections. In 1978 they were arrested and jailed for plotting to overthrow the government. Amnesty International called them "prisoners of conscience" and said "the accusations (against them) were used to stifle radical Muslim activity". They were still in prison when Muklas arrived at their school in 1979.

It was a historic year - the year of the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Muklas and his classmates used to march around the schoolyard handing out leaflets and collecting money to send to the Afghan mujahideen. One of Muklas's peers said later "The jihad atmosphere dominated our campus".

For Muklas this was a profoundly formative time. He said later - "This boarding school really taught me about the real sense of brotherhood, so we could truly love Islam". Once again, how empowering that must have been – being part of a nationwide brotherhood, which in turn was part of a growing worldwide movement.

Muklas graduated in 1982 and became a trainee teacher at the school, the same year that Ba'asyir and Sungkar were released from prison. He became one of their devotees and three years later followed them into exile in Malaysia, where they would spend the next 13 years establishing their new group, JI.

Muklas by now clearly believed that he was on a path ordained by God. He said later: "I prayed and asked for Allah's guidance and even in that prayer I had a dream… I dreamed I saw the prophet Muhammad. He advised me to go ahead, to continue walking, because I had a noble goal and was walking on the paths of the prophets, of the holy and devout."

It was around this time that he chose his nom-de-guerre – Muklas is an Arabic name that means "to be pure". Later, during the Bali bombings, he would choose a new Hindu alias – Rama - to symbolise courage, chivalry and obedience to sacred law.

Muklas's next stop after Malaysia was Afghanistan, where he was sent with other JI recruits for military training in the mid '80s. At this stage Amrozi was still at home in Tenggulun making a nuisance of himself; he'd gone back to school and dropped out again, re-married and then divorced a second time.

Ali Imron by this time had finally got his long-held wish to follow in Muklas's footsteps and been sent off to the Ngruki school. Mind you he only lasted there a month. He got so homesick that he pretended to be ill so his family came and got him and took him home again.

Muklas spent three years in his Afghanistan boot camp, training alongside fellow mujahideen from all over the world. Like many of them, he came under the thrall of Osama bin Laden, a financier of the camp he was in. Muklas claimed to have fought with bin Laden and said later "He is a real leader, he is one human being that I very much adore in this life."

It was here that Muklas and his fellow travellers were persuaded that they were part of something much bigger than themselves, and that their separate causes – whether they were from Indonesia or the Philippines, the Middle East or the Balkans – were all part of the same global holy struggle.

This was a revolution and they were revolutionaries.

To Muklas it was glorious, even romantic. He told an interviewer: "I have had a wife, I have had my first night, but the pleasure is nothing, not even close, compared to the pleasure of war. It was very, very delightful – especially when we see our friends who bravely died a holy death. They smelled fragrant, they were smiling…" (and so on)

And of course when the war ended with the defeat of the Soviet army this was proof to Muklas and the others that there was *no* struggle they *couldn't* win.

Muklas returned home at the end of the war and set up a new school for JI in southern Malaysia, modelled on the Ngruki school. Both of his brothers, Amrozi & Ali Imron, finally followed him to Malaysia. Amrozi got a job on construction site using explosives to blast roads. He told later of hearing the foreigners who worked on the construction site regaling each other with stories of their holidays in Bali, drinking and chasing women, and he said: "They were talking about Indonesia and they did not know I was Indonesian. They wanted to destroy Indonesia and I hated them for that".

Amrozi by now had finally tired of being the black sheep. He was desperate to win the favor of his big brother, so he gave up smoking and drinking and started praying. He then went in search of Muklas and found him in southern Malaysia, but Muklas turned him away, considering him unworthy. Amrozi persisted and went back again, until finally Muklas forgave him and took him in. Amrozi recalled later: "At that point he trusted me, it was like finally I was worthy of sitting here."

For Amrozi *this* was the key turning point: acceptance by his revered older brother, which in turn meant an entrée into the elite brotherhood of the mujahideen.

Ali Imron ended up in Malaysia too. After dropping out of the Ngruki school Ali was nervous about being the failure of the family, especially now that even Amrozi had mended his ways. So at the age of nineteen he travelled to Malaysia, intending like Amrozi to work on a construction site.

But Muklas had other plans for his littlest brother. He sent him off to Ba'asyir and Sungkar to be sworn in and then, almost before Ali Imron knew what was happening, sent him off for training in Afghanistan. And so Ali Imron too found himself in the hallowed company of the mujahideen.

When Ali returned from Afghanistan the three brothers were re-united at Muklas's school, which had become a new base for JI. There they were part of an exclusive community – a cult more or less – a little society of jihadists, cut off from the rest of the world and from normal society.

They saw themselves as superior, special, chosen. They were on a mission. They weren't quite sure yet exactly *what* their mission was, but it would soon fall into place after a series of historical events through the 1990s.

The first of these was the 1990 Gulf War. Muklas was later asked by the Indonesian police when it was that he first began planning to wage jihad against the US and its allies. And he replied: "Since the first Gulf War when the United States attacked Iraq and placed hundreds and thousands of its soldiers in the Arab peninsula". This event didn't provoke Muklas into action at the time, only after it became the jihadists' mantra following bin Laden's Declaration of Jihad.

A more immediate catalyst for Muklas and his brothers came with the fall of Suharto in 1998. This caused two things to happen. One was that JI's leaders, Ba'asyir and Sungkar, returned home to resume their campaign for an Islamic state, identifying it now as a "life or death" struggle and declaring: "We have two choices - life in a nation based on the Koran and Sunnah, or death while striving to implement it."

The other thing that happened was that the long-suppressed sectarian tensions in some of Indonesia's provinces erupted into open warfare, most notably in Ambon in the Maluku islands. And so Indonesia had its very own holy war; Ambon became like a little Afghanistan for JI.

One by one the three brothers returned to Indonesia. Amrozi went back to Tenggulun to be the village mechanic and handyman, his oily jeans and long hair now replaced by traditional robes and a skullcap. One of his former wives said, "His clothes were all different, his attitude was very different, he was not the same man at all."

Ali Imron returned to Tenggulun as well to become a teacher at the small Islamic school that his family had set up in the village in his absence, modelled on Ba'asyir's Ngruki school. Like Amrozi, Ali Imron had found his role in life. He explained later: "When I returned I was an Afghan alumnus so I thought it was fitting to be dealing with jihad matters. While I was teaching students at the boarding school I continued to plant the concept of jihad. Whatever was being discussed, I preached about jihad."

Muklas was by now a senior figure in JI, a member of its central command and its regional *shura*. He was still running the JI school in Malaysia but came home after the fall of Suharto to attend a meeting with his brothers and others from JI, where they agreed that the time had come to wage jihad in Indonesia.

There was much debate within JI over how they should do this. Bin Laden had recently issued his fatwah instructing all Muslims to "kill and fight Americans and their allies, whether civilians or military". The fatwah was passed on within JI by its operations chief, Hambali, and it caused great consternation.

Many in JI believed – and still believe - that attacking the US and its allies was a distraction from the main game of fighting for an Islamic state in Indonesia. Some also believed that killing civilians was against Islam.

But the hardliners – among them the three brothers – had no such qualms.

The brothers by now were part of a hardened and deeply bonded band. They had been displaced and exiled from their country, many for over a decade. In some ways they were strangers in their own land. They certainly had no loyalty to its new democratic regime.

The returned exiles were determined to wage jihad, and bin Laden's fatwa, endorsed by JI's top leaders, was the green light they needed. For them Ba'asyir's "life and death" struggle had become inseparable from bin Laden's jihad against the west.

From there it was a series of simple – though horrendous – steps that led them to Bali. They started by joining the provincial holy war in Ambon, a crucial breeding and training ground for JI. Next they started bombing Christian churches. Then they car-bombed the Philippines ambassador in Jakarta in retaliation for the Philippine army's attack on their training camp in Mindanao. In 2000 they carried out synchronised attacks on

dozens of churches across Indonesia on Christmas Eve, killing 19 people and injuring 120.

Throughout this time the internal debate over killing civilians intensified within JI – and in the minds of some of the bombers.

Ali Imron said: "We realised that there were other human beings that we attacked. We didn't want to think much about it. To be involved in jihad, we had to have enemies right? I dared not think about anything."

Finally in October 2002 they bombed the nightclubs in Bali, killing 202 people. They did it, they said, because of the deaths of Muslims in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and because of Australia's role in separating East Timor from Indonesia.

They also did it because, since they were small boys in Tenggulun, they had been brought up to be mujahideen – warriors for Islam. Their social and family networks, the radical Islamic schooling, their personal exposure to Indonesia's historic jihad, and their own experience of real-live holy war, in Afghanistan and later Ambon, had shaped them and determined their path.

And finally, exposure to bin Laden's apocalyptic vision had convinced them there was a new enemy: the United States and its allies in the West.

Only Ali Imron expressed remorse after the event. He explained later, "After I became a fugutive I looked back at the history of the Prophet Mohammed and our Muslim predecessors and I realised there was no such kind of jihad. It shouldn't be a bloodbath, not like that. Those people at the Sari Club, they weren't soldiers, prepared to go to war and therefore prepared to die… So I realised what I did was wrong."

Muklas and Amrozi had no such regrets. "This is jihad, not drugs", said Muklas. "We are not sorry at all. Until bombs stop dropping on Muslims around the world we will keep going. We will never stop."

“Even when we are dead”, Amrozi added, “our children and grandchildren will continue. There will be a million Amrozis to come.”