

## How to stop HATERS from turning into KILLERS

Zakir Hussain

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In a new book on how several Jemaah Islamiah leaders became radical and went from haters to killers, security expert Kumar Ramakrishna outlines some strategies to combat the extremist threat in the region

Pornography can help in the battle against the scourge of radical ideas that spawn militants and terrorists, security expert Kumar Ramakrishna suggests.

He is not asking that extremist websites be flooded with X-rated images and videos. He is simply saying that it might be a good idea to take advantage of a terrorist leader's penchant for raunchy material to undercut the movement's attractiveness to potential recruits, or even hardliners.

The terrorist leader he is talking about is Imam Samudra, one of the Indonesians who coordinated the bombing of a Bali nightclub in 2002. He was executed last November, but his will and writings continue to be circulated in radical Jemaah Islamiah (JI) circles.

'It is known that Imam Samudra's laptop computer hard drive had pornographic material on it, specifically photographs of 'naked Western women', 'Associate Professor Kumar notes in his new book, *Radical Pathways: Understanding Muslim Radicalisation In Indonesia*.

Addressing doubts during Samudra's trial that the photos might have been planted, prosecutors said police cloning of the hard drive had been videotaped to ensure no tampering.

Samudra's weakness for flesh 'can be weaved by credible former JI leaders into a powerful 'counter-story' of Samudra's rank hypocrisy in targeting Bali for being 'a place of sin' while he entertained himself in his spare time by looking at nude women', he argues.

'A potent message could also be put across that Samudra and other JI leaders are concerned above all else with power and revenge, with the ethical essence of the Quran relegated to a secondary, less crucial consideration,' he adds.

Prof Kumar, who heads the Centre of Excellence for National Security at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, has also studied the psychological warfare strategies of the British colonial government in fighting the communist insurgency in Malaya in the 1950s.

The so-called battle for hearts and minds stressed the involvement of civilians, with military action used only as a last resort after propaganda and normal law enforcement have failed.

Over a decade, the rebels were defeated in their bid to create a communist Malaya as foot soldiers and ordinary people who were made aware of the excesses of the rebel leaders refused to support them.

To be sure, Prof Kumar acknowledges that applying such a strategy to countering JI terrorism needs to be carefully executed, as JI leaders enjoy a certain prestige and immunity from outsiders' criticisms.

He feels that deploying 'good radicals' - former JI members who have renounced their

violent past, like ex-regional chief Nasir Abas - to speak to the 'bad radicals', as is being done in Indonesia, can be more effective than roping in moderate Muslim leaders, as the former have more 'street cred' and can engage radicals in their own language.

Many of these radicals, after all, led ordinary lives but a confluence of cultural, social and psychological factors drove them to hatred, he says.

His book zooms in on how seven JI members behind the Bali terror blasts of 2002 became radicalised, and turned into killers.

The seven include JI spiritual leader Abu Bakar Bashir, Imam Samudra and Mukhlas, who headed the JI network covering Singapore and Malaysia. Like Imam Samudra, Mukhlas was executed last November.

Also studied are JI operational strategist Hambali, who is now in United States custody in Guantanamo Bay; Amrozi, who was also executed in November; Ali Imron, who is serving a life sentence; and Arnasan, who drove the van containing explosives in the Bali blasts.

Mukhlas was the elder brother of Amrozi and Ali Imron.

Prof Kumar's engaging narrative draws on a wide range of sources, including police interrogation reports, expert assessments, journalistic accounts and sociological and psychological works on extremism.

He makes the case that just as the radical pathways of these seven are complex and sufficiently varied even as there are similarities between them, the measures to tackle radicalisation have to be multi-faceted and wide-ranging.

He also notes that although the JI terror network has been weakened and split into several factions, it is far from dead.

'It remains very much a significant threat because of one compelling factor: Its ability to regenerate through the continuing radicalisation of new recruits to the radical Islamist cause,' he writes.

His 290-page book is divided into five chapters. The first outlines a 'Radical Pathways' framework, in which an interplay of cultural factors - ideology, local historical forces, geopolitics and group dynamics - exerts pressure on an individual to radicalise him.

The key to the radicalisation process, though, is what he calls an 'existential identity anxiety' - a primal fear that the 'group' to which they belonged, in this case Muslims, was under threat.

The fear led to them viewing the world through an us-versus-them lens, a binary perspective which enabled them to dehumanise their victims, and thus legitimise their violent acts.

The second chapter gives an overview of the wider historical and cultural 'garden' in which Indonesian Islam, particularly Javanese Islam, developed.

Javanese Islam contains a strong sense of tolerance for other faiths and persuasions, and an understanding that Islam must be contextualised to meet Javanese realities and accommodate cultural practices.

But it has also had to contend with a harder-edged strain. Adherents of this strain call for the setting up of an Islamic state - an objective traditional scholars today say has no basis in the religion.

As the next two chapters in the book outline, this harder strain gave rise to the Darul Islam (House of Islam) extremist movement in the 1940s. Initially a resistance against Dutch colonialism, the movement continued its armed struggle against the new (secular) Indonesian state when Sukarno came to power.

The movement is largely moribund today but its teachings persist. Indeed, they have a profound influence on the world views of key JI figures.

However, while Darul Islam kept its struggle for an Islamic state local, the JI has visions for an Islamic state spanning a large swathe of South-east Asia.

Bashir, now 70, was deeply moved by the Darul Islam's struggle, and a stint in jail from 1978 to 1982 for involvement in violent militancy further radicalised him.

Samudra, who was born in 1970, became close to former Darul Islam fighters in his youth. They fired his zeal for militancy and led him to undergo weapons training in Afghanistan in the early 1990s.

As for Hambali, his inability to hold down a job, and his search for a father figure, led him into the arms of radicals, who showed him the way to Afghanistan, where he developed international militant contacts and blossomed as a leader.

Prof Kumar argues that these experiences themselves also offer a way out of the radical mindset, citing the case of Ali Imron, who, once captured and freed from the influence and groupthink of his JI brothers, was able to reflect on his misdeeds and repent.

In his final chapter, Prof Kumar argues that blocking the radical pathways travelled by the JI leaders requires not so much winning, but rather denying, Indonesian Muslim hearts and minds to JI ideologies.

Beyond psychological warfare, he sees a need to immunise the wider community against radical ideas.

One way is through inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue involving students from an early age, so they build friendships across religious lines and have a much lesser risk of developing us-versus-them mindsets.

The United States also has a key role to play, to take the wind out of extremists' claims that America is against Muslims, he says.

The most critical role, however, remains to be played by Muslim scholars and educationists in Indonesia.

They should continue to encourage the development of critical, independent thought on the part of young Muslims - as many have been doing - to better contain leanings towards the hardline interpretation of Islam favoured by radicals and their sympathisers.

Says Prof Kumar: 'A big part of the solution to the threat of religious radicalisation seems to

be the simplest one: Teaching people from the time they are young to think for themselves.'

Radical Pathways is published by Praeger Security International and is available online.