

# Typological Varieties of Transnational Jihadism and Implications for Conflict Resolution

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## Abstract

*Conflicts involving transnational jihadist actors have been difficult to resolve. Are global jihadist groups uniquely resilient or conflict prone? In order to address this question, this article unpacks what we mean by global jihadism and evaluates how different aspects of transnationalism affect the prospects of conflict termination and disengagement from violence, drawing on existing arguments from both terrorism studies and peace studies. The article develops a new typology of armed Islamist groups, based on whether they have national or transnational goals, engage in national or transnational mobilization, and operate in one or multiple countries. Building on this typology, the article underlines three potential vulnerabilities of transnational armed actors: localization, fragmentation and public backlash. The empirical section illustrates these vulnerabilities and the tensions that can emerge between local and global imperatives in the case of the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah.*

**Keywords:** jihad, transnational actors, typology, conflict resolution, Jemaah Islamiyah

## Introduction

Since 2014, there has been a new spike in the number of armed conflicts. Unlike the period following the end of the Cold War, the recent decade has not seen a corresponding increase in peace agreements, in part because there are more religious claims and a higher proportion of internationalized conflicts.[1] Conflict scholars have shown that when belligerents anchor their grievances in religious claims, the conflicting issues are perceived as indivisible, and the conflict is therefore less likely to be settled through negotiations.[2] With the expansion of the Islamic State, religious claims have taken on a more transnational dimension. In 2016, for instance, 60 percent of Islamist armed conflicts were fought over transnational jihadist aims centering on the establishment of a caliphate.[3] These transnational insurgencies are particularly intractable, not only because their ideology and goals leave no bargaining space, but also because they are able to elicit transnational support from both states and rebels, which increases the uncertainty about capabilities.[4]

While al-Qaeda and the Islamic State may pose new and unique challenges to conflict resolution, transnational jihadist groups are not the first or only armed actors to frame their grievances in universal terms, try to mobilize international support, or establish transnational links with other rebels. The Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany, for instance, sought to overthrow Western imperialism and obtained military training from Middle Eastern militants. Irish nationalists frequently obtained arms and money from Ghaddafi, who also supported a variety of other militant groups, from the Italian Red Brigades to the Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA).[5] Is there something uniquely resilient and conflict prone about today's transnational jihadist groups?

In order to address this question, this article seeks to unpack what we mean by global jihadism and evaluate how different aspects of transnationalism affect the prospects of conflict termination and disengagement from violence, drawing on arguments from both terrorism studies and peace studies. Next, a new categorization of transnational armed Islamist groups is proposed based on the local versus global nature of their goals, mobilization, and geographic operation. A distinction along these dimensions allows us to differentiate between global jihadist groups, local branches of global jihadists, and local jihadists with international support or multiple operation centers. Whereas global jihadist groups may indeed be particularly conflict prone, they can also face pressures to localize. Localization opens transnational armed actors to tensions between local and global imperatives and can lead to two additional vulnerabilities: fragmentation and public backlash. After reflecting on how these vulnerabilities affect conflict, this article considers the case of Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia before concluding with some policy implications.

### ***Global Jihad and the Challenges of Conflict Termination***

Global jihadism as a phenomenon is usually traced back to the 1980s, when mujahidin from around the world joined the fight against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Such transnational mobilization against the occupation of Muslim lands was not unprecedented. For example, during the Arab Revolt in Palestine (1936–1939), the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood sent weapons and volunteers to confront British and Zionist forces. [6] At that time, its leader Hassan al-Banna offered an ideological justification for such defensive military actions against occupying forces, but scholars generally consider the Palestinian Sunni scholar Abdullah Azzam to be the intellectual founder of global jihadism. [7] Azzam's focus was global, yet centered around territory, considering it an individual duty for Muslims to liberate occupied Muslim lands, such as in Afghanistan or Palestine. Over the years, the emphasis of global jihad shifted, with Osama bin Laden targeting the far enemy, even as other ideologues continued to focus on the near enemy and apostate regimes. [8] After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the nature of global jihadism changed again, taking on a more sectarian dimension, and after the rise of the Islamic State in 2014 it focused on the territorial consolidation of a caliphate. Whereas today we may think of the Islamic State as the clearest instantiation of global jihadism after al-Qaeda, Robinson suggests that of the different waves of global jihad, "ISIS has the least claim to a global agenda, but the greatest ability to recruit." [9]

This underlines that under the umbrella of global jihadism, there can be variation in terms of goals, focus, relation to territory, or nature of mobilization. Groups can diverge in terms of whether they focus on local or foreign recruitment and whether their attacks are in the core theater, or outside of their main area of operation. [10] These aspects of global jihadism have implications for the prospects of conflict termination and disengagement from violence. In order to evaluate whether transnational armed Islamist groups may pose a unique threat, it is important to briefly consider the challenges posed by different aspects of transnationalism: goals, ideological appeal, area of operation, sources of material support, and military recruitment and training.

Without detailing the diversity of jihadist ideologies, a major fault line that separates transnational armed Islamist groups from revolutionary or separatist Islamist groups is the nature of their claims. [11] Rather than seeking national liberation, regional autonomy or a regime change, transnational jihadist groups have aspirations that go beyond the nation or the state, seeking either the establishment of a regional caliphate or a change in the global order. This is relevant for conflict resolution because maximalist goals make compromise and negotiations impossible, leaving no space for bargaining. [12] Zartman suggests that unlimited ends tend to lead to unlimited means, and any attempt to negotiate with such groups would only encourage them. In order to be able to even consider negotiations, there has to be something to negotiate about, whether territory, independence or other conditions. [13]

Groups with transnational aims may operate across multiple countries, as we have seen with al-Qaeda, or they may be concentrated in one territory, as is the case with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which has been primarily based in Yemen. On the one hand, having no operational center of gravity may make it more difficult to defeat a group militarily, since it can adapt to the conditions of different zones of armed conflict. [14] On the other hand, having multiple operational centers is also likely to elicit a stronger counterterrorism response from states and encourages more cooperation and coordination among countries, as we have seen with the Global War on Terror. In Southeast Asia, the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) started out with an organizational structure that spread across multiple countries, but after the 2002 Bali attacks, not only did the Indonesian counterterrorism unit Densus 88 receive support from both the United States and Australia, but in 2003 ASEAN also created a new security community to strengthen the regional capacity to fight terrorism. Strong counterterrorism measures by Malaysia and the Philippines eventually forced JI to abandon its regional operations and center its activities in Indonesia. [15]

Transnational goals may resonate with a variety of audiences around the globe, though separatist and revolutionary Islamist groups can also frame their grievances in a way that garners support from an international audience. When a group can elicit international support (from other state or non-state actors) and is able to

recruit foreign fighters, the cost of fighting and the pressure to settle are both lower and there is greater uncertainty about capabilities, which can lead to commitment problems.[16] This uncertainty, however, can also be a potential source of vulnerability for groups. Mendelsohn argues that al-Qaeda overestimated its strength and international appeal, while underestimating the appeal of national and tribal identities.[17]

Foreign fighters can also escalate violence and extend conflicts. They bring technical skills, which can lead to more lethal tactics. Research has shown that high-intensity conflicts tend to be less likely to be resolved by means of a negotiated settlement.[18] Foreign fighters can also radicalize ideologies and mobilize additional resources, thereby significantly strengthening rebel groups.[19] When armed groups rely on foreign fighters, they are less dependent upon on the local population, which reduces pressures to moderate their tactics and undermines incentives for compromise and settlement.[20] Malet suggests that in the Syrian civil war foreign fighters constituted a small percentage of the rebel forces, but they had a disproportionately high impact on conflict, escalating levels of violence and making rebel groups more resilient.[21]

Foreign fighters are not the only form of external support. Armed groups may also receive material or technical support from states, and such third-party interventions tend to decrease the likelihood of reaching a negotiated settlement.[22] National diasporas can also offer support, but their impact on violence is more complex—at times they prolong the conflict whereas other times they can push groups toward negotiations.[23] In this regard, support from diasporas may present both a challenge and an opportunity for conflict termination.

This brief overview underlines that there are three major aspects of transnationalism that can make global jihadist groups particularly resilient and conflict prone: the nature of their goals, their ability to mobilize transnational support, and their ability to operate across multiple countries. Yet not all armed Islamist actors may display all three of these characteristics. Based on these three criteria, it is possible to create a new categorization of transnational armed Islamist actors, which can open new possibilities to evaluate the potential challenges to conflict termination posed by different types of actors. The next section develops this typology.[24]

### ***Toward a New Typology of Transnational Armed Islamist Groups***

If we differentiate among armed Islamist groups along the three dimensions that are particularly consequential for conflict (goals, mobilization and area of operation), we can identify eight different types of actors detailed in Table 1.

At one end of the spectrum are Islamist groups that have transnational goals, recruit globally, and operate across multiple countries. These are global jihadist groups, such as al-Qaeda. At the other end of the spectrum are local jihadists or national Islamists that recruit locally, operate in one country, and whose main goals are national or local, such as the implementation of shariah law, the Islamization of their own society, or national liberation. Such groups can be local jihadists like al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt in the early 1980s, or national Islamists like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, or the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Since local jihadists have more limited goals, they may be more amenable to enter negotiations, even if they do not consider the state or the political institutions as legitimate. National Islamists may be amenable to enter the political process or power-sharing agreements. Global jihadists, on the other hand, pose significant challenges to conflict resolution, as discussed in the previous section. A key question is whether global jihadism is sustainable, or whether it is bound to face pressures to localize.

In between global jihadists and national Islamists are a variety of other possibilities, as well as two processes of change: internationalization and localization. We have seen groups that start with a national or local focus later pledge their allegiance to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, undergoing a process of internationalization. As both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State expanded, they established local branches around the world, undergoing a process of localization.

Table 1. Typology of Transnational Armed Islamist Actors

	Transnational Goals (global revolution/caliphate)		National/Local Goals (regime or policy change/liberation)	
	Transnational mobilization & recruitment	National/local mobilization & recruitment	Transnational mobilization & recruitment	National/local mobilization & recruitment
Operates across multiple countries	<i>Global jihadist</i>	<i>Global jihadist with multiple operational centers</i>	<i>Jihadist with multiple operational centers</i>	<i>Local jihadist/national Islamist with cross-national operations</i>
Operates in one country	<i>Localized global jihadist with international support</i>	<i>Localized global jihadist</i>	<i>Jihadist with international support</i>	<i>Local jihadist/National Islamists</i>

Groups that have transnational goals and operate in multiple countries but mainly rely on local recruitment in each of those countries can be considered global jihadists with multiple operational centers. We can expect such groups to develop stronger ties to the local community, and be more vulnerable to public pressures in response to violence. Local recruitment can also reduce the problem of resource uncertainty. If a group relies primarily on local recruitment, but the goals continue to be transnational, the group may, in fact, become more vulnerable to disagreements over the extent to which the priority should remain global, or whether the group should start focusing more on local concerns and domestic enemies.

Localized global jihadist movements have transnational goals, but only operate in one country and recruit locally. An example would be Ansar al-Shariah in Tunisia, a Salafi-jihadist militant organization that was committed to establishing an Islamic state in Tunisia, but also considered itself to be part of a broader global jihadist movement, sending foreign fighters to Libya and Syria.[25] If such a group manages to recruit both locally and transnationally, we can consider it to be a localized global movement with international support. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), for example, operates primarily in Yemen, but it is able to recruit both locally and attract foreign fighters.[26] In this typology, the term operate refers to the physical presence in a particular territory, whether it is in the form of a cell, an organizational structure, or a cluster of leaders. It does not refer to targets of attacks or to the presence of individual members or sympathizers who may stage an attack. In this sense, AQAP can be considered to be a localized global jihadist group with international support because it operates primarily out of Yemen, even if a few attacks claimed in its name took place on American soil.

Armed Islamist groups with national or local goals may also exhibit aspects of transnationalism if they operate in multiple countries or recruit foreign fighters. National groups that only recruit locally but operate across borders can be considered local jihadists/national Islamists with cross-national operations. This may occur when conditions in the homeland are very restrictive or the ruling regime uses excessive violence so that opposition leaders have to flee the country, establishing a presence abroad. Alternatively, groups may operate in areas with porous borders or in frontier areas and extend their presence across borders, especially in response to regime repression or counterinsurgency operations. An example is the Pakistani Taliban, which recruits mainly locally and is focused on national goals, but whose presence has extended from the tribal areas of Pakistan into Eastern Afghanistan.[27]

Groups with a national focus that recruit transnationally and operate in multiple countries can be considered jihadists with multiple operational centers. They are not global jihadists, because their primary goals are national, but they are jihadists because in order to recruit transnationally they frame their grievances as a more universal struggle while also invoking tenets of jihadism. An example would be the Indonesian JI during its

early period. The group was founded primarily to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, but its founders had spent time in Malaysia before joining the mujahideen in Afghanistan, so when they established the group they recruited among both Indonesians and Malaysians.[28] When JI developed its organizational structure, the group was divided into four regional areas of command, extending to Malaysia, Singapore and Mindanao in the Philippines. Unlike JI, Ahrar al-Sham has been able to recruit both locally and transnationally, but it has only operated in Syria, hence it can be described as a jihadist group with international support.

As with any typology, these eight categories represent ideal types that may not always adequately capture the complex realities on the ground. Since the focus here is on the challenges of transnationalism, for the purpose of categorization, we classify groups as having transnational goals if the leadership focuses on such goals either exclusively or along national goals. Similarly, we label groups as relying on transnational recruitment if such recruitment is significant, even when they also recruit locally. Identifying transnational goals and recruitment is therefore a question of thresholds. At times, discerning the importance of the transnational dimension may be a challenging task, making it difficult to neatly place some groups in this typology. Yet the value of the typology is not only in identifying these ideal types and the nature of localization or internationalization, but also in serving as a heuristic device that can help us identify tensions between a group's local and transnational imperatives.

When there is a disconnect between the nature of goals (local vs. global) and the nature of recruitment (local vs. transnational), groups may be vulnerable to internal tensions, fragmentation and public backlash, especially if the use of foreign fighters leads to heightened levels of violence against the local population. We have seen such tensions in a variety of al-Qaeda affiliates. In al-Shabaab, who started with a national focus but recruited both domestic and foreign fighters, disagreements emerged about whether the conflict in Somalia was primarily a Somali fight, or merely one front in the global jihad. The leader exhibiting support for global jihad was criticized for lacking local clan roots and for disregarding local fighters and the lives of civilians.[29]

In the previous sections we have considered the ways in which the transnational aspects of groups may close down opportunities for conflict resolution. The next section examines in greater detail whether localization can open up opportunities for conflict termination as a consequence of fragmentation and public backlash.

### ***The Vulnerabilities of Transnational Armed Actors: Localization, Fragmentation, and Public Backlash***

Mendelsohn suggests that even though transnational jihadism retains its vitality, there are certain structural characteristics that also constrain jihadist movements.[30] Jihadists have underestimated the appeal of national and tribal identities, overestimating the salience of transnational goals and their ability to transform the world. In the absence of a viable strategic plan for a global revolution, and faced with a strong response from the United States and other members of the international community, groups like al-Qaeda started establishing branches and delegating authority to them. This inadvertently created locally oriented power centers over which the central leadership had little control. This "localization" trap created tensions between local and global priorities, leading to ineffective strategies and disagreements. Such disagreements led to the fragmentation of the jihadist movement, which was further exacerbated by clashing egos and the preexisting decentralization of authority in Islam. Transnational jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS have also underestimated public opposition to high-intensity violence, severe restrictions, and disruptions in traditional social and legal practices resulting from counterterrorist operations.

Fragmentation, however, does not guarantee that jihadist groups lay down arms or are willing to negotiate. Fragmented movements are more likely to escalate levels of violence, [31] and fragmentation can also create incentives for spoilers to challenge peace settlements.[32] Furthermore, infighting can also weaken groups and lead to internal decline.[33] If a process of deradicalization is under way, fragmentation can result in the breaking away of the most radical voices, which can enable organizations to move away from violence, as was

the case with the Egyptian al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (GI).[34]

Fragmentation opens the possibility of moderate voices emerging within the leadership, who might be willing to engage in talks. Whereas scholars tend to agree that negotiating with the central leadership of al-Qaeda is unrealistic because it has absolutist goals and nonnegotiable positions, some think it may be possible to talk with al-Qaeda affiliates, or with elements that are detached from the hardcore base, especially if the dialogue is localized and about specific concerns.[35]

Localization does not always imply a reduction in violence, and its effects depend in part on the nature of leadership. The Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda under al-Zarqawi embarked on a “counterproductive spiral of violence” against the Shi'a community, tarnishing al-Qaeda's reputation.[36] However, the localization of transnational armed actors makes them vulnerable to fragmentation and holds the potential to change their relationship to the local community, especially if the group starts relying more on local recruits than on foreign fighters, or if its operations become territorially confined.

In the Syrian conflict, al-Qaeda found it necessary to develop “locally embedded Salafi jihadi” groups in order to compete against the Islamic State. Afterward, these groups had incentives to break away from al-Qaeda because their association with it could antagonize local allies and make them the target of international counterterrorism efforts.[37] When the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, which later transformed into Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), became the dominant force in Idlib, it developed a civilian technocratic administration to manage the province.[38] As HTS developed governing bodies, it started delegating many functions to non-HTS constituencies, placing educated local urban elite members in charge of many civilian positions, and allowing international NGOs to supervise the health sector. In order to maintain local legitimacy, the group avoided implementing strict Islamic law, and it embarked on rapprochement with Turkey. In the security realm, HTS sidelined more radical factions and collaborated with more mainstream factions in order to mobilize local support and maintain control of the province.[39]

Yet when a group becomes more dependent on the local community, it also becomes more vulnerable to public backlash. This alone may not change a group's behavior or push it toward reconciliation, but it can exert additional pressure and increase the costs of violence. In the case of GI in Egypt, escalating levels of violence against civilians and informants turned previously sympathetic communities against the group. As GI began losing support in different localities in Upper Egypt, it continued shifting its area of operations until by the end of 1996 it became unable to sustain confrontations in any location.[40] The combination of military defeat and public condemnation raised the costs of violence and led to widespread disillusionment within the group, eventually pushing its leaders to renounce violence in 1997.[41]

### ***JI and the Double-Edged Sword of Transnationalism***

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore a case from each category of the proposed new typology. Instead, we seek to illustrate the processes of internationalization and localization and probe the tensions between the global and local imperatives in the context of a single case, while recognizing that the extent to which insights from this case are generalizable remains to be tested. We selected the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) because it has undergone both internationalization and localization. Its evolution can illustrate these processes and demonstrate how groups may change categories over time. JI is also a case whose connection to global jihad has been contested from the beginning; it can therefore also expose both the challenges and the value of categorizing transnational armed actors.

JI has some clear transnational elements. It was formed in Afghanistan, and it developed a transnational organizational structure with four regional areas of command. While JI does not conscript foreign fighters as widely as some other global jihadists, in Afghanistan it recruited among both Indonesians and Malaysians. Treating JI as a global jihadist organization, however, obscures the group's historical connections to Indonesia, and the

fact that for its emirs the primary goal has been the creation of an Islamic state in Indonesia.

Jl emerged as a breakaway group from the Indonesian Darul Islam (DI) network. DI started as an Islamist rebellion during Indonesia's early independence period (1945–1949), and after it was defeated in the early 1960s, subsequent generations of DI activists continued to promote the vision of an Islamic state in Indonesia. During the 1980s, DI members traveled to Afghanistan for military training, which infused the movement with new ideas about global jihad and a caliphate.[42] When DI members Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir formed Jl, their goal was to build an Islamic state in Indonesia, but they also considered it to become the basis of a future Southeast Asian caliphate. Former member Nasir Abas recounts that Jl held weekly lessons about the history of DI in Indonesia, and part of his motivation to join as a non-Indonesian was to “liberate” the land that had once been declared an Islamic state by DI.[43] Instead of insisting on a territorial state, however, Jl focused on building a counter-society, which could amass sufficient resources and develop a strong enough organizational structure to transform into a counter-state.[44]

The homage to both an Islamic state in Indonesia and a caliphate muddles the distinction between national and transnational goals and shows the challenge of categorization. Experts on the group consider the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia the primary and most immediate goal of Jl, because of the historical roots to DI and because a caliphate necessitates the establishment of an Islamic state as a base to begin with.[45] Given this national focus but global recruitment and operation, we consider Jl an Indonesian jihadi group with multiple operation centers rather than a global jihadist group. As the discussion will show, the distinction can help us understand some of the tensions between the local and global imperatives within Jl.

Jl's transnational operations embedded the group in multiple zones of armed conflict beyond the main mission and influenced the scope and targets of violence. In 1997, Jl plotted an attack on a train station in Singapore, but the attack was never carried out.[46] As Jl established military training camps in Mindanao, several Jl leaders also pledged to support the activities of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) by attacking the Philippine Ambassador in Jakarta.[47]

Jl's transnational recruitment and military training also posed obstacles to conflict resolution by bringing technical expertise into the local conflicts in Poso and Ambon, thereby escalating the intensity of the violence. In Ambon, Jl participated in the conflict under the umbrella of Laskar Mujahidin, contributing important military skills and weapons.[48] In Poso, Jl members provided military training to local Muslim youth and propagated jihadist religious interpretations.[49] Scholars have shown that Jl's involvement in Poso significantly altered the conflict and led to a “terror period,” characterized by bombings, shootings and assassinations.[50]

The transnational dimension of Jl also opened the group to some vulnerabilities. Having multiple operational centers prompted a strong response from other states, especially after 9/11, incapacitating the Jl in Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. This forced the group to abandon its regional structure and concentrate its operations on Indonesia, changing to a jihadist group with (dwindling) international support. This localization out of necessity did not drastically alter Jl's mission or its position on violence, but it diminished its resources, forced the group to reconsider the costs of violence in the Indonesian context, and pushed the central Jl leadership to “return to its Darul Islam roots” and focus on *da'wa* outside of the direct armed conflict zones.[51] Jl limited its violence to Poso, where it organized military trainings and continued attacks on Christians in spite of the Malino Peace Accords of 2001. Outside of Poso, violence became very costly: Jl was severely weakened by counterterrorism efforts after 2002, and the public was outraged by the carnage of terrorist attacks, initially refusing to believe that Indonesians could be capable of such acts.[52]

Jl reveals that tensions can emerge when a group's priorities are national, but the operations and recruitment are transnational. These strains came to the foreground after Osama bin Laden's 1998 fatwa that called for a jihad against the West. Al-Qaeda's call sparked a debate and growing divisions between the Indonesia-based leaders, who thought the focus should be on cultivating strong cadres through *da'wa* and building an Islamic state in Indonesia, and the Malaysia-based leaders, who wanted to join the anti-Western struggle.[53] These di-

visions exacerbated after Sunkgar's death in November 1999, leading to deep fragmentation within the organization. In the context of weak leadership, this fragmentation enabled high-level terrorist attacks by factions and splinter groups, such as the 2002 and 2005 Bali attacks, the 2003 Marriot attacks in Jakarta, the 2004 bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, and the 2009 attacks on Marriot and Ritz Carlton in Jakarta. But fragmentation also left these factions weakened and exposed, facilitating their incapacitation by the government and enabling the JI leadership to coalesce around the rejection of terrorist tactics outside of direct conflict zones. By 2004, JI leaders condemned terrorist attacks and urged members to collaborate with the police if rogue factions continued their unsanctioned violence.[54]

After a 2007 government raid in Poso ended JI's military activities there, JI shifted its focus exclusively to tactics of proselytizing and capacity building. Since then, aside from a temporary attempt to revive the military wing, the group has focused on nonviolent religious activism and propaganda inside Indonesia, putting armed struggle on hold. This was not an ideological renouncement of violence, but a pragmatic reassessment of strategy in the Indonesian context. Prominent members, along with the spiritual leader Abu Rusydan, emphasized that when Muslims are too weak to confront the state and conditions do not allow for jihad, it is necessary to focus on preparations. As Chernov Hwang notes, JI learned that it "could either change strategies or be arrested into irrelevance." [55] Since its prioritization of *da'wa* over jihad, some JI members have left the group and joined other jihadist movements. JI has not been able to prevent this, but it has remained committed to the suspension of violence inside Indonesia, even as other jihadists continued in the use of violence or joined the Islamic State. [56]

### ***Rethinking Policy Responses toward Transnational Armed Actors***

Global jihadist groups can pose significant challenges for mediation and conflict termination. However, transnational armed groups also often face pressures to localize, which can introduce tensions between the local and global imperatives and make groups vulnerable to fragmentation and public backlash. These vulnerabilities are not guaranteed to lure groups away from violence—fragmentation may lead to a spike in militancy in the short run—but they may present incentives for de-escalation.

Scholars have suggested that in order to be able to address conflicts involving transnational armed Islamist groups, it is critical to de-link them from the transnational struggles, re-localize conflicts, and disaggregate the different dimensions of transnational jihadism.[57] By developing a typology of transnational armed Islamist actors, this article has considered what such a disaggregation might look like and has shown that localization can present both opportunities and challenges. Localization can change the costs of violence and encourage groups to have more limited aims and to develop stronger ties to the local community, thereby becoming more vulnerable to public pressures for compromise and settlement. Localization can also foster fragmentation, especially if there are disagreements over strategy and objectives, and tensions between the scope of mobilization (local versus transnational) and the scope of goals (national versus global). In turn, fragmentation may open avenues for mediation, but it can also lead to escalation, at least in the short run.

The case of the Indonesian JI suggests that the path away from violence may not always be through military destruction or follow a negotiated settlement. At times, groups that have embraced jihad may recognize that armed action is too costly in their local context, and it needs to be placed on hold. Such temporary cessation of violence may not be an optimal solution, but it may be a feasible way to save lives.



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## Notes

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