

The Taliban's Victory as a Strategic Catalyst: Radicalism in Indonesia After a Flawed Global Peace Process

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Abstract

The return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 marked a pivotal moment in global discourse, widely interpreted as a monumental victory for jihadist movements. This event was not a simple military takeover but the culmination of a flawed diplomatic initiative (the 2020 Doha Agreement) and a reflection of a broader U.S. grand strategy of retrenchment. In Indonesia, the principal locus of Jemaah Islamiyah activity, this event was expected to inspire renewed radical mobilization and violent escalation. However, this anticipated surge did not materialize. Instead, the post-2021 period has been characterized by ideological recalibration. This research contends that the reaction to the Taliban's return is best understood through the analytical lens of Social Movement Theory (SMT), situated within the context of a failed peace process. It argued that the Taliban's victory acted as a critical external shock that primarily functioned as ideological validation for the patient, long-term strategies of established groups like Al Jamaah Al Islamiyah (AJAI). The event simultaneously intensified the "framing contestation" with its pro-Islamic State (IS) rivals and, most critically, accelerated AJAI's strategic evolution towards socio-political infiltration (*tamkin siyasi*). This has reshaped the primary radical threat in the region from overt attacks to strategic, long-term subversion, backed by AJAI's profound organizational resilience. The research analyzed these dynamics by examining shifts in political opportunities, resource mobilization, and framing processes, demonstrating how failures in global peacemaking can have complex and unforeseen consequences on regional extremist landscapes.

Keywords: radicalism, Indonesia, Al Jamaah AL Islamiyah, Taliban, social movement theory, Doha Agreement

Introduction

The re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan in August 2021 was a watershed moment whose repercussions resonated across the global jihadist landscape. The dramatic, televised fall of Kabul was more than just the end of a 20-year American military presence; it was a symbolic shockwave interpreted by a multitude of jihadist groups as a monumental victory against a global superpower and a symbol of divine endorsement for long-term armed resistance (Semple et al., 2021). This event, rich in historical and ideological significance, provided a powerful narrative of triumph against overwhelming odds, a modern-day parallel to foundational stories of faith and perseverance that animate Islamist movements worldwide. The victory was immediately seized upon as a source of inspiration, validation, and potent propaganda.

For analysts and policymakers in Indonesia, this development raised immediate and grave concerns. Indonesia has a long and complex history with Afghanistan, dating back to the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s, which saw thousands of Indonesian fighters travel to the Afghan-Pakistan border. These veterans, the so-called "Afghan alumni," returned to their home countries with military skills, international networks, and a hardened Salafi-jihadist ideology that would form the nucleus of future terrorist organizations, most notably AJAI. AJAI is a Southeast Asian Islamist militant network aiming to establish an Islamic state, with ideological and operational links to transnational jihadist movements (Singh, 2007; Muhammad, 2015). It has been described as a clandestine organization that combines religious outreach with violent extremism, evolving its strategies in response to state repression and changing political contexts (Barton, 2005). Given this deep historical linkage, the expectation was that the Taliban's 2021 victory would act as a powerful ideological accelerant, inspiring a new wave of radical mobilization, recruitment, and, most worryingly, violent escalation. The fear was that the "euphoria of Islamic victory" would translate into copycat attacks and a dangerous operational resurgence of dormant or weakened terrorist networks across Indonesia, and its neighboring countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

However, this anticipated surge in violence did not materialize. Instead, the post-2021 period in Indonesia has been characterized more by a profound and complex ideological recalibration than an operational resurgence. This presents a critical puzzle: why did an event of such symbolic magnitude fail to produce the expected kinetic consequences? This research contends that the answer lies not in simple causal assumptions linking inspiration to action, but in a deeper understanding of two interconnected factors: the unique nature of the Taliban's victory as the culmination of a flawed global peace process, and the specific internal dynamics of the Indonesian jihadist milieu after the Doha Agreement 2020.

To understand the reaction in the Indonesia, one must first grasp the global context that enabled the Taliban's return. This was not a spontaneous military conquest but the direct

outcome of a deeply flawed diplomatic process culminating in the February 2020 Doha Agreement. This accord, negotiated directly and exclusively between the United States and the Taliban, fundamentally excluded the internationally recognized Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, treating it not as a sovereign partner but as a secondary actor (Sadr, 2024). This design is widely seen as a withdrawal agreement for the U.S. rather than a viable roadmap for peace, a process that granted the Taliban immense international legitimacy while fatally undermining the very government it was meant to negotiate with (Center for Dialogue and Progress-Geneva, 2022). This U.S. policy was itself driven by a larger strategic pivot: a grand strategy of retrenchment aimed at reducing costly military engagements in the Middle East and South Asia to redirect resources towards great power competition, primarily with China (Cipto, 2018; Wardoyo, 2024). This geopolitical calculation prioritized U.S. interests over the stability of Afghanistan, creating a power vacuum that the Taliban were poised to fill.

It is against this backdrop of diplomatic failure, strategic realignment, and subsequent humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan that the response in Indonesia must be analyzed. The divergence between the expected violent outcome and the observed ideological recalibration invites a closer examination of how jihadist groups in Indonesia interpret global events and adapt their strategies. One school of thought argues that the Taliban's success would serve as a potent catalyst for recruitment (Adi & Purba, 2021). In contrast, another perspective contends that violence in Indonesia is often catalyzed by news of defeat, injustice, or sad news, specifically in response to direct foreign intervention, such as the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Wibowo, 2023).

This research applies Social Movement Theory (SMT) as its primary analytical lens to resolve this puzzle and interpret these complex dynamics. SMT provides a powerful framework for understanding how social movements, including radical ones, respond not only to state repression or institutional opportunities but also to symbolic shifts in the global landscape (McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 2011). It moves the analysis beyond a focus on ideology alone to examine the strategic calculations, organizational capacities, and discursive struggles that shape a movement's trajectory.

The central thesis of this research is that the Taliban's victory did not inspire an immediate return to violence in Indonesia because its primary impact was ideological, not operational. It functioned as a strategic catalyst that validated and thereby accelerated the ongoing strategic evolution of AJAI – the region's most established Al-Qaeda-linked group – towards a more subtle, long-term approach of socio-political infiltration, a strategy known as *tamkin siyasi*. Simultaneously, the victory deepened the pre-existing ideological rift between AJAI and its pro-Islamic State (IS) rivals, who framed the Taliban's diplomatic engagement as a betrayal of jihadist principles. The research argues that this shift, underpinned by AJAI's sophisticated and proven organizational resilience, fundamentally transforms the group into a hybrid threat that blends political subversion with latent militancy. Consequently, the most significant impact of the Taliban's return was not on violent tactics but on strategic regeneration and the sharpening of internal ideological boundaries, reshaping the primary threat from one of overt terrorism to a more complex and enduring challenge of long-term, strategic subversion.

Literature Review/Analytical Framework

This research situates radical violent groups within the framework of SMT, moving beyond simplistic depictions of them as monolithic criminal entities. SMT is a theoretical framework within sociology that seeks to explain how collective actors mobilize resources, construct shared meanings, and exploit political opportunities to pursue social and political change. Rather than viewing movements as spontaneous or purely grievance-driven, SMT emphasizes structured processes such as resource mobilization, framing strategies, and political opportunity structures that shape the emergence, trajectory, and outcomes of social movements (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tarrow, 2011). By focusing on the interaction between agency and structure, SMT allows scholars to analyze how movements adapt to constraints, build legitimacy, and influence broader institutional and normative environments, making it particularly useful for interpreting complex and dynamic sociopolitical phenomena. SMT provides a robust analytical lens by conceptualizing groups like AJAI and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), whose splinter networks have weak ideological and historical roots in AJAI, as social movement organizations (SMOs) engaged in "contentious politics" (Tarrow, 2011). This approach allows for a more dynamic analysis of their strategic evolution, organizational resilience, and ideological debates, which are often overlooked in purely security-focused or theological studies. Furthermore, the central argument of this research that the Taliban's 2021 victory acted as a strategic catalyst for ideological recalibration rather than immediate violence in Indonesia. This argument is built upon a careful examination of existing scholarship concerning the global peace process, the historical development of regional radicalism, and the specific implications of the Taliban's return to power.

The Flawed Peace Process as a Critical External Shock

The response of Indonesia radical groups cannot be understood in a vacuum. It is a direct reaction to a global event whose foundations are deeply flawed. The 2020 Doha Agreement, ostensibly a peace accord, is now widely understood by scholars as a principal catalyst for the Afghan Republic's collapse. A critical flaw, identified early on, is its fundamental design as a bilateral negotiation between the United States and the Taliban that deliberately excluded the internationally recognized Afghan government. Malik (2020) argues that this exclusion was the agreement's essential loophole, rendering it unstable from the outset. By treating the Afghan government as a secondary actor, the U.S. fatally undermined its legitimacy while simultaneously bestowing significant international credibility upon the Taliban insurgency. This transformed the process from a viable peace roadmap into what Malik (2020) describes as a thinly veiled withdrawal agreement for the U.S. It creates a clear timeline for American departure without establishing credible enforcement mechanisms or incentives for the Taliban to engage in sincere intra-Afghan dialogue. This diplomatic failure, driven by a broader U.S. strategy of retrenchment from the War on Terror to focus on great power competition, constituted a critical external shock that would ripple across the global jihadist landscape. The subsequent Taliban victory is, therefore, not merely a military outcome but the political culmination of this flawed international peace process.

Divergent Trajectories in Indonesian Jihadism: A Pre-2021 Baseline

To accurately measure the impact of the re-emergence of Taliban, it is essential to understand the pre-existing conditions within the Indonesian jihadist milieu. By 2021, the landscape was not uniform but was defined by a deep and long-standing ideological schism, primarily between pro-Al Qaeda and pro-Islamic State factions. The pro-Al Qaeda faction refers to militant groups and networks that remain aligned with Al-Qaeda, emphasizing a gradualist strategy, local embedding, and long-term struggle against perceived enemies of Islam (Zenn, 2020). In contrast, the pro-Islamic State faction adopts a more immediate and absolutist approach, prioritizing the rapid establishment of a caliphate, territorial control, and extreme violence against both state and rival Islamist actors (Winter, 2015; Hassan, 2018). Historically, radicalism in Indonesia has deep domestic roots, with movements like Darul Islam (DI), an armed Islamist movement founded in 1949 that sought to establish an Islamic state (*Negara Islam Indonesia*) in opposition to the secular Indonesian republic (van Dijk, 1981). The movement waged a prolonged insurgency across several regions before being largely suppressed in the early 1960s, though its ideological legacy continues to influence later militant networks (Solahudin, 2013). DI provided an ideological heritage for later groups like Jemaah Islamiyah (von der Mehden, 2005). This historical legacy fostered a strategic patience within AJAI, especially after it was decimated following the 2002 Bali bombings.

The contemporary manifestation of this divide is sharpened by the global split between Al Qaeda and IS. Selçuk and Panagiotou (2020) show that the rise of IS and its declaration of a caliphate in 2014 had a profound impact on Southeast Asia, leading to the formation of new allegiances and deepening rivalries. AJAI, on one side, despite being weakened, had adopted a long-term strategy of *tamkin* (consolidation) focused on grassroots infiltration and societal influence, eschewing large-scale violence. *Tamkin* is a concept referring to the gradual consolidation and strengthening of power, where a movement builds social, political, and institutional influence over time as a foundation for establishing broader authority (Hafez, 2003). On the other side is the fragmented but aggressive pro-IS network, chiefly represented by JAD in Indonesia. These groups, inspired by IS's strategy of immediate and spectacular violence, stand in stark ideological opposition to AJAI's patient approach. This internal division creates a competitive ideological marketplace where different strategic paradigms, patience versus immediacy and consolidation versus confrontation, compete for legitimacy. It is into this contested landscape that the shock of the Taliban's victory is introduced.

The Taliban's Victory: A Catalyst for Ideological Validation and Contestation

The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 was immediately interpreted through the competing lenses of this regional rivalry. As a leading analyst on the topic, Singh (2022) notes that the event triggered a sense of euphoria among various jihadist groups in the region. However, this euphoria was not monolithic. For established pro-Al Qaeda groups like AJAI, the victory was framed as a monumental vindication of their own long-term strategy. Singh (2022) highlights that leaders of AJAI-affiliated groups celebrated the Taliban's success as exemplary for its 'consistency in fighting on the path of Allah,' drawing a direct parallel to

their own patient struggle. It was seen as tangible proof that a superpower could be defeated not through rash, spectacular attacks, but through decades of persistent, resilient, and strategic struggle.

Conversely, for pro-IS groups, the Taliban's diplomatic engagement with the U.S. in Doha and their focus on governing a nation-state rather than a global caliphate were framed as acts of apostasy and betrayal (Singh, 2022). This divergence demonstrates that the event's primary impact was not to unify the jihadist movement but to intensify the pre-existing "framing contestation" (Snow & Benford, 2000).

Synthesizing the Literature through a Social Movement Theory Framework

The dynamics identified in the literature, namely a flawed global process creating a shock, a divided regional landscape receiving it, and competing interpretations of its meaning, are best analyzed systematically through the tripartite SMT framework.

First is Political Opportunity Structures (POS). The literature demonstrates that the Taliban's victory opened a crucial "window of political opportunity," but not in the traditional, institutional sense. Instead, it is a symbolic and discursive opportunity. The flawed diplomacy detailed by Malik (2020) culminates in a victory that provides what McAdam (1982) calls cognitive liberation for groups pursuing a long-term strategy. It alters their perception of the possibility of success, validating their strategic choices and reinforcing their belief that victory is achievable (Singh, 2022).

Second is Resource Mobilization (RM). The primary resource generated by the Taliban's victory is not financial or material but symbolic and cultural. As Singh (2022) implies, the "David-versus-Goliath" narrative became a potent new form of symbolic capital. This narrative can be leveraged in propaganda to boost morale, attract recruits, and provide a fresh, emotionally resonant justification for fundraising under humanitarian pretexts, a classic resource mobilization strategy.

Third is Framing Processes. The literature makes it clear that the Taliban's victory became a focal point for an intense framing contest. This contest takes place on the ideological fault lines previously established by the Al Qaeda-IS split, as described by Selçuk and Panagiotou (2020). JI and its allies successfully frame the victory as a vindication of strategic patience, thereby strengthening their own legitimacy and organizational cohesion. Meanwhile, pro-IS groups frame it as a betrayal of jihadist principles, a necessary counter-narrative to maintain their ideological purity and distinguish themselves from their rivals (Singh, 2022). This framework allows for a dynamic understanding of how these groups actively interpret and instrumentalize global events to serve their strategic goals.

Research Method

This research applies a qualitative research design to explore how radical Islamist movements in Southeast Asia responded to the Taliban's return to power in 2021. Moreover, this research is an interpretive analysis grounded in discourse and organizational dynamics, aimed to understand how ideological groups perceive global events, reinterpret their goals, and recalibrate their strategies. The primary source of data is secondary and includes a wide range of materials published between 2020 and 2024.

Data collection techniques involve a comprehensive review of published reports from policy institutes like the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS); academic journal articles focusing on terrorism, political Islam, and Southeast Asian security; expert commentary from think tanks and news outlets; and media coverage from the period immediately preceding and following the Taliban's takeover. The analysis also incorporates data from documents specifically related to the Doha peace process and its aftermath to provide essential geopolitical context.

Data analysis is conducted using a thematic analysis approach, guided by the tripartite framework of SMT. The research identifies recurring themes and patterns related to political opportunities, resource mobilization, and framing processes within the discourse of Southeast Asian jihadist groups. By triangulating these diverse sources, the research identifies patterns of organizational adaptation and ideological contestation across the region's complex radical landscape, ensuring a holistic and well-supported analysis.

Analysis

The strategic response of Indonesian radical groups to the Taliban's re-emergence must be contextualized within the unique political nature of that victory. The 2021 takeover was not merely a military triumph but the culmination of the deeply flawed 2020 Doha Agreement. This agreement, designed primarily as a mechanism for the U.S. withdrawal, fatally undermined the Afghan Republic by excluding it from direct negotiations, thereby granting the Taliban immense international legitimacy while sidelining Washington's key ally (Malik, 2020). This diplomatic failure provided the ultimate symbolic validation for global jihadist movements.

In Indonesia, the anticipated surge in copycat violence does not materialize. Instead, the external shock functioned as a powerful catalyst for ideological recalibration. For groups like AJAI, the Taliban's success affirmed their long-term strategy of strategic patience and socio-political infiltration (*tamkin siyasi*). Conversely, the diplomatic maneuvering in Doha simultaneously intensified the framing contestation with their pro-Islamic State (IS) rivals, who framed the Taliban as apostates for engaging with the "crusader" United States (Singh, 2022). Thus, the Taliban's return, engineered by a flawed peace process, reshaped the regional threat from one of immediate, kinetic attacks to one of complex, strategic subversion.

Understanding the catastrophic failure of the Doha Agreement is essential to unlocking the divergent strategic calculus of jihadis thousands of miles away.

The Global Precedent: A Flawed Peace and a Strategic Withdrawal

The response of Indonesian radical groups cannot be understood without first analyzing the nature of the Taliban's victory. It was not merely a military triumph but a political one, engineered through a diplomatic process that many experts now view as a catastrophic failure. The 2020 Doha Agreement, rather than fostering peace, created the conditions for the Afghan Republic's collapse. By negotiating directly and exclusively with the Taliban, the U.S. administration effectively bypassed and delegitimized its ally, the Afghan government. As noted by Sadr (2024), the process suffers from a flawed peace process design from the outset. The exclusion of the Afghan Republic from the first stage of talks and the pre-negotiated release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners are costly concessions that signaled to the Taliban that they could achieve their primary objectives without genuine compromise (Sadr, 2024). The agreement lacks a credible third-party guarantor, with Pakistan unwilling to play the role and other regional powers like Russia and China kept at arm's length, leaving no mechanism to enforce the Taliban's vague commitments (Khan, 2020). The process became a withdrawal agreement that gave the Taliban a clear timeline and removed any incentive for them to engage in good-faith intra-Afghan dialogue (Center for Dialogue and Progress-Geneva, 2022).

This diplomatic approach is underpinned by a larger shift in U.S. foreign policy. The withdrawal is a key element of a retrenchment strategy, designed to reallocate U.S. military and financial resources away from the War on Terror and towards containing a rising China (Wardoyo, 2024). This pivot represents a major change in the global distribution of power and priorities. As Wardoyo (2024) demonstrates through analysis of defense spending and military deployments, the U.S. has been steadily shifting its strategic focus from the Middle East (periphery) to the Indo-Pacific (core). Afghanistan became a casualty of this larger geopolitical realignment.

The immediate result in Afghanistan is a humanitarian catastrophe. The U.S. freeze on Afghan central bank assets decimated the economy. The World Food Programme (2021) reported in late 2021 that 93% of Afghans were suffering from insufficient food consumption, a 13% increase from before the U.S. exit. The number of people facing acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or higher) nearly doubled, from 10.9 million in March-May 2021 to a projected 22.8 million by late 2021 (Izza & Basuki, 2024). This crisis highlights the profound human cost of a poorly managed peace process and strategic withdrawal.

The Pre-2021 Indonesian Landscape: Divergent Trajectories

To accurately measure the impact of this global event, it is essential to establish a baseline of the radical landscape in Indonesia prior to August 2021. This period was shaped by two decades of counter-terrorism pressure and the territorial collapse of the Islamic State (IS), a transnational jihadist organization that declared a global caliphate in 2014 and sought to govern territory through extreme violence and strict ideological control (Gerges, 2016;

Bunzel, 2015). IS distinguishes itself from other militant groups through its immediate state-building ambition and uncompromising takfiri doctrine, which legitimizes violence against both non-Muslims and rival Muslims deemed insufficiently orthodox.

First is the strategic resilience of the pro-Al Qaeda -AJAI. Decimated by arrests following the 2002 Bali bombings and subsequent security operations, AJAI underwent a fundamental reorientation under its new amir, Para Wijayanto. It shifts from 'jihad now' to 'jihad later,' emphasizing a long-term strategy of *tamkin* through consolidation or the establishment of a solid foundation (Ramakrishna, 2022). This strategy involves three core activities: *dakwah* (preaching) and education through a vast network of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*); sophisticated financial mobilization through non-profit organizations (NPOs), such as Baitul Maal Abdurrahman Bin Auf (BM ABA); and pragmatic political engagement by building coalitions (*tansiq*) with other Islamist groups and infiltrating mainstream institutions such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) (IPAC, 2021). Before the Taliban's return, AJAI was a movement in a state of quiet, strategic hibernation, weakened but resilient, non-violent by choice but retaining its military aspirations (Satria, 2023).

On the other hand, the pro-IS camp, primarily represented by Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), is characterized by organizational decay and fragmentation. The 2019 territorial defeat of the caliphate and high-profile arrests in Indonesia, including those of its leader Aman Abdurrahman, left the movement operationally decentralized and effectively leaderless (Liow, 2020). The threat shifts from coordinated attacks to low-capacity plots by small, localized cells or inspired lone actors. Thus, on the eve of the Taliban's victory, the pro-IS landscape was a scattered collection of disparate cells, lacking the organizational coherence, strategic patience, and deep societal roots that defined its rival, AJAI.

Strategic Responses in Southeast Asia: An SMT Analysis

The Taliban's victory resonates ideologically across the region, but it does not translate into a uniform wave of violent mobilization. Instead, movement responses are filtered through internal strategic logics and organizational capacities. These dynamics can be best analyzed through three SMT pillars.

First is interpreting opportunity, which emphasizes strategic patience over tactical escalation. For AJAI, the Taliban's victory is not a call to arms but a profound moment of ideological validation and window of political opportunity that affirmed its strategic choices (Meyer, 2004). Having pursued a patient, long-term *tamkin* strategy for over a decade, AJAI interpreted the Taliban's success as tangible proof that a strategy prioritizing resilience and grassroots consolidation could ultimately defeat a superpower. This sense of validation is palpable. Indonesian police interrogations reveal that AJAI detainees express 'euphoria' over the event, viewing it as a direct affirmation of their own strategy and a sign that moving from a stage of weakness (*marhala idtidlaf*) to power through armed struggle (*jihad fisabilillah*) is a viable path (IPAC, 2021). Rohim Bashyir, a pro-Al Qaeda leader, described the Taliban's return as 'exemplary' for its consistency in fighting on the path of Allah (Adyatama, 2022). This perception creates a crucial cognitive liberation, reinforcing the belief that AJAI's long

struggle is not futile and that its patient, non-confrontational posture is a calculated and winning strategy rather than a sign of weakness (McAdam, 1982).

Second is mobilizing symbolic capital, which focuses on legitimacy, resources, and networks. The Taliban's return was leveraged to generate new symbolic and material resources. Symbolically, the victory provided a powerful new propaganda narrative. As articulated by Praditya (2024), radical groups are adept at exploiting cultural trends to attract recruits. The Taliban's heroic "David-versus-Goliath" story offered fresh, compelling content for dissemination through social media and sermons, invaluable for attracting a younger generation primed with narratives of global Muslim grievance.

Materially, the event opened new avenues for financial mobilization. AJAI's sophisticated network of NPOs and charities, skilled at exploiting public generosity, found a perfect pretext in the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan. As a former AJAI member, Nasir Abbas warned, groups like AJAI are skilled at using humanitarian issues to raise operational funds (Adyatama, 2022). The new situation in Afghanistan offered an emotionally resonant and seemingly legitimate cause, allowing AJAI-affiliated charities to solicit public donations that could be covertly channeled to support the organization's long-term needs, from maintaining its structure to funding its educational networks (Ghoni & Masyhar, 2022). This demonstrates a classic resource mobilization strategy, in which an external event is instrumentalized to acquire necessary financial capital.

Third is framing the victory, which focuses on intra-movement contestation and ideological boundaries. Perhaps the most significant impact was how the Taliban's victory intensified the framing contest between the pro-Al Qaeda and pro-IS camps, sharpening their ideological divide (Snow & Benford, 2000). Each faction frames the event to legitimize its own worldview.

For the pro-Al Qaeda camp (including AJAI), the dominant frame is one of victory and validation. They celebrate the Taliban's success as a triumph for global jihad and a testament to the virtue of strategic patience, a direct parallel to their own *tamkin* strategy. This frame reinforces group cohesion and validates the leadership's long-term vision.

In contrast, the pro-IS camp framed the event as one of apostasy and betrayal. IS supporters in Indonesia labeled the Taliban as *murtad* (apostates) for engaging in diplomacy with the 'crusader' United States, for their perceived nationalism in prioritizing the Afghan state over a global caliphate, and for their alleged tolerance of Shia Muslims (Arianti & Rahmah, 2022). This narrative of betrayal is crucial for IS supporters to maintain ideological purity and distinguish themselves from the Taliban-Al Qaeda axis.

This 'framing of war' is complicated by a third, pragmatic frame promoted by mainstream figures such as former Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla, who portrayed the 'new' Taliban as a moderate actor (Mizuno & Aidulsyah, 2021). This inadvertently bestows a degree of legitimacy on the Taliban, making it harder for governments to counter the celebratory narratives circulating within radical networks and illustrating the complexity of managing public discourse in the wake of such events.

Strategic Implications and the Evolution of Threat

The ideological recalibration catalyzed by the Taliban's victory has profound strategic implications for Indonesia, fundamentally reshaping the nature of the radical threat. The primary consequence has not been a resurgence of spectacular, Bali-style bombings, but rather the acceleration of a more insidious, long-term, and politically sophisticated form of subversion, primarily driven by AJAI. This evolution, validated by the Taliban's success, transforms the threat from a purely kinetic one to a hybrid challenge that blends political infiltration, social engineering, and latent militancy. This shift, combined with AJAI's proven organizational resilience, makes it the most strategic and enduring radical threat in the region today.

The Taliban's victory, a successful transition from a decades-long insurgency to a governing authority, served as the ultimate proof of concept for a strategic paradigm that had been gaining ground within AJAI for over a decade: *tamkin siyasi*, or political consolidation. This strategy represents a pragmatic and calculated evolution from a singular focus on armed jihad (bullets) to a more patient, multi-pronged approach that includes political participation (ballots) (Ashour, 2009; Surwandono & Ahmadi, 2011). The objective of *tamkin siyasi* is not to abandon violence indefinitely but to create a political and social environment conducive to the eventual establishment of a Sharia-based state, thereby making armed struggle a viable option in the future when conditions are right (Arianti, 2022).

For years, a faction within AJAI, led by influential figures like Farid Okbah and Abu Rusdan, had advocated for a more direct engagement with the political process. They argued that a purely clandestine, militaristic approach had proven counterproductive, leading to the group's decimation and isolation. Instead, they championed a strategy of infiltrating mainstream society through three primary avenues: *dakwah* (preaching and education), *hisbah* (enforcing social-religious norms), and *siyasah* (politics). The Taliban's ability to outlast a global superpower and seize control of a state not just through fighting but through shrewd diplomacy and political maneuvering provided this faction with an irrefutable argument. It demonstrates that negotiation and political engagement are not ideological compromises, as pro-IS rivals claimed, but were in fact essential components of a winning, long-term strategy. The victory generated a powerful shift in perceived political possibilities, akin to what McAdam (1982) conceptualizes as cognitive liberation and reinforcing AJAI's confidence in gradualist strategies while reshaping internal strategic calculations (IPAC, 2021).

This foray into contentious politics culminated in a more audacious move: the 2021 establishment of the Indonesian People's Dakwah Party (PDRI). While ostensibly a legitimate political entity, analysts widely view PDRI as a front organization designed to serve as AJAI's political vehicle for the 2024 elections and beyond (Ramakrishna, 2022). This is not a sign of moderation but a calculated, long-term strategy to change the Indonesian democratic system into a Sharia-based one from within (Ramakrishna, 2022). By placing cadres in political office, influencing legislation, and shaping public policy, AJAI aims to methodically erode the foundations of Pancasila-based democracy and create a state more aligned with its ideological vision. This shift mirrors the Taliban's own historical trajectory of blending military action

with political governance and tribal engagement, a model that AJAI now sees as the blueprint for its own future success.

The strategic shift towards political subversion is made uniquely dangerous by AJAI's profound and time-tested organizational resilience. Unlike the fragmented and personality-driven cells of the pro-IS network, AJAI has deliberately engineered a sophisticated and durable organizational structure capable of surviving intense and sustained counter-terrorism pressure, including repeated leadership decapitations. This resilience is not accidental. It is the product of a meticulous organizational design that functions more like a clandestine state-in-waiting than a simple terrorist group.

Research by Satria (2023) illuminates the key mechanisms that underpin this durability. First is the establishment of a formal, hierarchical structure with clear lines of succession, including contingency leadership bodies like the *Tim Lajnah* (Committee Team), which can immediately assume command when senior leaders are captured. This prevents the organizational paralysis that often cripples other groups. Second is a system of strict internal discipline (*hisbah*) that enforces ideological conformity, maintains operational security, and punishes deviance, ensuring cohesion and preventing internal fragmentation. Third, and perhaps most critically, AJAI has developed a robust ecosystem of support programs that function as a shadow social welfare system for its members and their families. This includes the PERISAI legal advocacy wing, which provides legal aid to arrested members, and the *Matlubin* system, a dedicated fugitive support network that provides safe houses, funds, and logistics for members on the run.

This deep-seated resilience means AJAI's political turn should not be mistake compellingly for genuine moderation or a rejection of violence. Nuraniyah and Solahudin (2024) argue that AJAI is in a state of hybrid deradicalization. It has undergone a partial tactical shift towards non-violence but has crucially not dismantled its military wing; it has merely placed it in reserve. The organization continues to operate clandestine training camps, sends cadres for military training abroad, and maintains hidden weapons caches, all while retaining the theological justification for armed jihad when the conditions are right (IPAC, 2021).

This creates a uniquely dangerous, hybrid threat. The immediate, overt threat of a Bali-style bombing has been replaced by the more insidious, long-term threat of societal and political subversion. AJAI is playing a long game, patiently building its power and influence within the system it aims to overthrow. Its organizational structure allows it to absorb losses, adapt its strategy, and maintain its core capabilities while simultaneously pursuing a political agenda. This combination of political sophistication and latent military potential makes AJAI the most enduring and strategic radical threat in Southeast Asia.

The Taliban's victory did not only empower AJAI, it also threw the pro-IS camp into a state of ideological disarray, thereby widening the chasm between the two main poles of the jihadist movement in the region. The event intensified the intra-movement framing contest, forcing each side to articulate a clear narrative that legitimized its own worldview while

delegitimizing its rival. This ideological battle has significant implications for counter-terrorism strategy.

In stark contrast, the pro-IS camp was forced into a defensive and reactive posture. Their entire ideology was predicated on the concept of an extant, expanding caliphate and a rejection of any form of compromise with apostate systems or crusader powers. The Taliban's diplomatic dealings with the U.S. and its establishment of a nationalist emirate were fundamentally incompatible with this worldview. Consequently, pro-IS propagandists in Indonesia and Malaysia framed the Taliban as *murtad* (apostates) and traitors to the global jihad (Arianti & Rahmah, 2022). This narrative of betrayal was essential for them to maintain ideological purity and create a clear boundary between "true" jihadis (themselves) and "compromisers" (the Taliban-Al Qaeda axis).

This intensified framing war creates both challenges and opportunities. The challenge lies in the complexity of the narrative landscape. As mainstream figures like former Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla praised the "new" Taliban as a more moderate and pragmatic force, they inadvertently bestowed a degree of legitimacy on the group that complicated government efforts to counter AJAI's celebratory narrative (Mizuno & Aidulsyah, 2021). It illustrates the difficulty of managing public discourse when a designated terrorist group achieves a semblance of statehood.

However, the opportunity is significant. The deep and irreconcilable ideological rift between the pro-AQ and pro-IS camps is a critical vulnerability that can be exploited. Counter-narrative campaigns can be tailored to the specific ideological weaknesses of each side. For AJAI, narratives can highlight the Taliban's failure to govern effectively and its continued reliance on international aid, questioning the "victory". For pro-IS supporters, narratives can amplify their own leaders' accusations of the Taliban's "betrayal," thereby sowing further discord and disillusionment within a camp already suffering from fragmentation and a lack of central leadership. By understanding and leveraging this internal contestation, security agencies can move beyond a monolithic approach and engage in a more nuanced form of ideological warfare.

Conclusion

The re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan in August 2021 was a watershed moment whose impact on Indonesian radicalism was neither immediate nor straightforward. This study has argued that the event's significance cannot be understood as a simple trigger for violence but must be analyzed as a complex strategic catalyst, understood through the lens of Social Movement Theory and contextualized by the failure of the Doha Peace Process. The flawed nature of the 2020 Doha Agreement, which effectively functioned as a U.S. withdrawal strategy that sidelined the Afghan Republic, created a unique political victory for the Taliban. This victory served as a critical external shock to the Indonesian jihadist milieu, but its effects were filtered through the region's pre-existing ideological divisions and organizational trajectories.

Through the tripartite framework of SMT, this research has demonstrated how the Taliban's success was interpreted in divergent ways. For Al Jamaah Al Islamiyah (AJAI), it altered the political opportunity structure by providing a powerful window of ideological validation for its patient, long-term strategy. This event generated immense symbolic capital, a potent David-versus-Goliath narrative, that served as a fresh resource for propaganda. Most critically, the victory became the focal point of an intensified framing contestation. AJAI and its pro-Al Qaeda allies successfully framed the event as a vindication of strategic patience, strengthening their legitimacy. In contrast, pro-Islamic State (IS) rivals were forced to frame it as an ideological betrayal to maintain their own distinct identity, thus widening the ideological chasm that defines the regional movement.

Consequently, the most significant implication has not been a resurgence of terrorism but an acceleration of AJAI's strategic evolution towards a more insidious form of political infiltration, or *tamkin siyasi*. This pivot towards patient, socio-political subversion, now validated by the Taliban's success, is arguably a greater long-term threat than overt violence. This evolution, backed by the group's proven organizational resilience and latent military capability, repositions AJAI as a formidable hybrid threat. The failure of international diplomacy in Afghanistan, therefore, did not remain contained. It has reshaped the strategic calculus of domestic radical movements thousands of miles away, transforming the region's most enduring radical threat from a purely kinetic one to a sophisticated socio-political challenge.

Clearly, AJAI has profoundly shaped ASEAN by exposing the transnational nature of violent extremism and compelling regional counter-terrorism cooperation, even against the bloc's long-standing principle of non-interference. AJAI's ambition to establish a caliphate across Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines culminated in the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed 202 people and laid bare ASEAN's vulnerability to cross-border terrorism. These attacks destabilized the region, damaged tourism and investment, threatened social cohesion, and discredited governments and the security agencies.

In response, ASEAN members strengthened intelligence sharing, created specialized units such as Indonesia's Detachment 88, and adopted frameworks including the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism. AJAI's activities also exposed gaps in national legal systems and the growing threat of digital radicalization, pushing the bloc to pursue greater coordination. Sustained pressure contributed to JI's formal disbandment in June 2024, a significant security milestone. Nevertheless, its legacy persists through former members and online extremism, continuing to test ASEAN's unity and capacity to address evolving threats without compromising its core principles.

The Taliban's 2021 return to power affected AJAI primarily through psychological inspiration rather than operational revival. The victory generated euphoria among AJAI members, validating their long-term ideological strategy. However, operational impact remained minimal: Indonesian counter-terrorism efforts had already severely degraded AJAI through mass arrests, including the detention of its leader Para Wijayanto in 2020. AJAI also maintained strategic caution and its post-2004 focus on long-term infiltration rather than

immediate violence. Ultimately, while the Taliban's triumph boosted morale and propaganda, AJAI's operational capacity in Indonesia stayed significantly diminished.

This research carries significant policy implications that demand an urgent evolution in counterterrorism strategy. First, the ascendance of AJAI's political strategy means that an exclusive focus on kinetic threats is no longer sufficient. Security agencies must develop sophisticated capabilities to monitor and disrupt the subtler strategies of non-violent subversion. This requires a paradigm shift from solely preventing bombings to countering institutional infiltration, the use of political front organizations, and the exploitation of non-profit and charity organizations for fundraising. This new reality demands greater inter-agency cooperation, blending traditional law enforcement with political, social, and financial intelligence.

Second, the intensified framing contest between pro-AQ and pro-IS camps offers a critical vulnerability that policymakers should exploit. Nuanced counter-narratives should be tailored to the specific weaknesses of each camp. For AJAI's sympathizers, this means highlighting the Taliban's failures in governance to question their "victory". For pro-IS supporters, it means amplifying the narrative of the Taliban's ideological "betrayal" to sow further discord within a fragmented camp. Engaging in this nuanced form of ideological warfare is essential to disrupting their appeal.

Third, while the focus of this research has been on AJAI, the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) under Abu Mohammed al-Jolani's victory in Syria, a group linked to Al Qaeda and with Indonesian AJAI members having close ties with it, has intensified online extremism in Indonesia, widening ideological divides between pro-HTS and pro-IS supporters. It also presents a security dilemma over Indonesian fighters within HTS, who may pose threats if they return, prompting heightened government surveillance and expanded international counterterrorism cooperation efforts to mitigate risks.

Finally, AJAI's deep-seated organizational resilience underscores the limitations of a purely law-enforcement-based approach. While robust security measures are indispensable, they cannot alone defeat a movement embedding itself within communities, especially ideologically. A comprehensive, whole-of-society strategy is required, incorporating soft approaches to build societal resilience and address the local grievances that make extremist ideologies appealing. The threat in Indonesia has become more complex, more patient, and more political. The response must evolve with it.

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