

Counterintelligence-Based Prevention Framework: An Analysis of Indonesian Pathways to AQAP Recruitment, 2020–2024

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Abstract

This article examines the pathways through which Indonesian nationals became connected to the recruitment ecosystem of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen during 2020–2024 and develops a counterintelligence-based prevention framework to mitigate such transnational mobilization. Using a qualitative instrumental case study design, the research draws on semi-structured interviews with eleven key informants, documentary analysis, court-related materials, open-source intelligence, and thematic coding supported by NVivo 12. The findings show that Indonesian involvement in the AQAP ecosystem cannot be explained solely by ideological indoctrination. Instead, it emerges from the interaction of personal significance crises, jihadist narratives, social-religious networks, and structural opportunities created by legal or semi-legal mobility channels. Operationally, the mobilization process reflects the adaptation of intelligence tradecraft by non-state actors, including administrative cover, compartmentation, social embedding, and selective communication. The article argues that prevention requires an integrated counterintelligence model that combines early detection, network disruption, administrative-diplomatic screening, and interagency data fusion. This framework highlights the need to move beyond post-incident law enforcement and toward preventive, accountable, and intelligence-led intervention across the radicalization–facilitation–mobility continuum.

1. Introduction

Since its inception, Al-Qaeda (AQ) has undergone a fundamental transformation, shifting from a centralized command structure into a decentralized network based on regional affiliates (Byman & Mir, 2024; Mendelsohn, 2016). This transformation has enabled AQ to maintain its ideological and operational relevance by exploiting local grievances, building tactical alliances with local actors, and framing local conflicts within a broader transnational jihadist agenda (Braniff & Moghadam, 2011; Fürstenberg & Görzig, 2020; Kavrakis, 2023). Following the collapse of ISIS's territorial control in Syria and Iraq in 2019, AQ re-consolidated its strategic space by capitalizing on power vacuums in fragile states (Blair & Potter, 2022). This shift demonstrates that the threat of global jihadism no longer depends solely on coercive territorial control, but increasingly rests on extremist groups' capacity for social embedding and the construction of local legitimacy at the grassroots level (Celso, 2015; Byman, 2019; Titus & Gray, 2015).

The most concrete manifestation of this adaptive pattern can be observed in Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Operating within Yemen's conflict environment, which is marked by fragmented authority and the erosion of the state's monopoly over violence, AQAP has evolved beyond its role as a militant organization (Lewis, 2013; Clausen, 2019; Phillips, 2019). According to United Nations estimates, AQAP currently retains approximately 3,000 to 4,000 active militants operating across strategic areas of Yemen (United Nations Security Council, 2025).



Figure 1. Strategic Operating Areas of AQAP in Yemen

The resilience of AQAP is closely linked to its socio-political maneuvering, particularly its effort to portray itself as a protector of Sunni communities and an alternative provider of security (Pašagić, 2020; Cook et al., 2020). Throughout the 2020–2024 period, AQAP consistently disseminated cross-border propaganda through digital media and closed communication channels, positioning Yemen as a legitimate epicenter of global jihad in order to attract international sympathy and recruitment (Mir et al., 2021; Schwartz, 2024; Lakomy, 2024).

For Indonesia's security landscape, AQAP's dynamics present a latent and persistent threat. The historical, religious, and social connections between Indonesia and Yemen create legitimate channels of mobility, yet these channels remain vulnerable to exploitation as spaces for clandestine indoctrination and recruitment (Matesan, 2022; Sumpter & Franco, 2018; Karmon, 2015). Unlike the relatively massive and more visible mobilization of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to Syria, the mobility of Indonesian nationals (Warga Negara Indonesia or WNI) to Yemen operates within a highly ambiguous administrative space (Syauquillah & Faton, 2019; Sahrasad et al., 2019). Extremist actors often exploit legal entities and legitimate mobility channels, such as religious study visas, umrah travel, humanitarian missions, and diaspora networks, as operational cover reinforced by exposure to digital propaganda (Mølmen & Ravndal, 2023). At least 12 Indonesian nationals have been identified as having used such pathways to reach the AQAP ecosystem (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), 2024). The arrest of several AQAP facilitators and loyalists in 2024 further indicates that the group has exploited weaknesses in legal immigration systems (Antara News, 2024). This situation is further complicated by AQAP's localization of propaganda through Indonesian-language content, enabling the group to penetrate domestic radical cells without requiring direct physical contact (Milla et al., 2020).

The asymmetric and clandestine nature of this threat exposes weaknesses in Indonesia's national security architecture. Conventional security approaches that remain overly centered on post-incident law enforcement are no longer sufficient to counter infiltration that exploits legal bureaucratic channels (Wijaya, 2024). This condition requires a paradigmatic shift toward the optimization of anticipatory and pre-emptive counterintelligence functions. Unlike positive intelligence, which primarily focuses on information collection, counterintelligence actively emphasizes prevention, clandestine mapping,

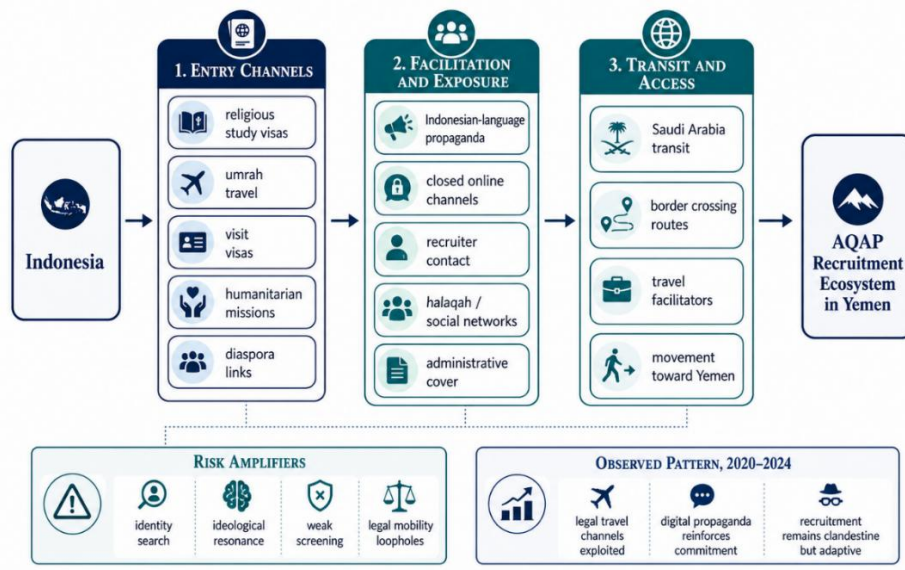


Figure 2. Indonesian Pathways to AQAP Recruitment Ecosystem

deception, and the disruption of adversarial subversive operations before such threats escalate into violence (Prunckun, 2019). However, the existing literature on Indonesian FTFs remains heavily dominated by analyses of mobilization toward ISIS in Syria, while the exploitation of administrative pathways to failed or fragile states such as Yemen remains a blind spot in academic discourse (Pašagić, 2020). Moreover, existing studies have not sufficiently translated recruitment-related findings into an operational counterintelligence policy design that incorporates democratic accountability and minimizes potential backlash against vulnerable communities (Heath-Kelly, 2024).

This article seeks to address these empirical and policy gaps by examining the pathways through which Indonesian nationals became connected to the AQAP recruitment ecosystem during the 2020–2024 consolidation period, while also formulating a counterintelligence-based prevention framework. Building on these gaps, the article addresses two central research questions: (1) What are the main pathways linking Indonesian nationals to the AQAP recruitment ecosystem during the 2020–2024 period? and (2) How can a counterintelligence-based prevention framework be constructed to mitigate exposure to this threat? The main contribution of this study lies in its integration of tactical analysis of clandestine recruitment with the formulation of an evidence-based and policy-relevant counterintelligence framework for Indonesia's national security architecture.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with an instrumental case study design to analyze the involvement of Indonesian nationals (Warga Negara Indonesia or WNI) in the ecosystem of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen and to formulate a counterintelligence-based prevention framework. This approach was selected because the phenomenon under investigation is clandestine, transnational, and difficult to explain through quantitative instruments alone. The instrumental case study design enabled the researcher to use the case of Indonesian mobilization to Yemen as an entry point for understanding broader issues, namely the relationship between transnational radicalization, socio-religious networks, the exploitation of legal mobility channels, and institutional responses by the state (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between August and November 2025. Informants were selected using a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used to identify informants who possessed direct knowledge, experience, or authority related to intelligence, counterterrorism, AQAP-linked mobility, and extremist recruitment networks. Snowball sampling was employed to reach informants from hard-to-access categories, particularly individuals with insider or emic knowledge of extremist networks and clandestine recruitment dynamics (Cohen et al., 2018).

The study involved eleven key informants grouped into three clusters. The first cluster consisted of state security officials and operational practitioners from intelligence, counterterrorism, and terrorism-prevention institutions, including the State Intelligence Agency (Badan Intelijen Negara or BIN), the Special Detachment 88 Anti-Terror Police Unit (Detasemen Khusus 88 Anti-Terror), and the National Counterterrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme or BNPT). The second cluster consisted of former members of extremist networks and former terrorism convicts who provided insider perspectives on recruitment patterns, ideological mentoring, social relations, and mobilization mechanisms. The third cluster consisted of academics and security researchers who served as analytical comparators and external validators of the findings. The inclusion of these three clusters was intended to balance institutional, insider, and scholarly perspectives.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide developed from the research questions and theoretical framework. The guide covered three major themes: the motivational and social drivers of Indonesian involvement in AQAP-linked networks, the operational methods and tradecraft used in transnational mobilization, and the counterintelligence strategies relevant to prevention. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on informant accessibility and the sensitivity of the information. With informant consent, interview data were recorded, transcribed, classified, and prepared for thematic analysis.

The unit of analysis consisted of Indonesian nationals linked to AQAP-related pathways during the 2020–2024 period. Secondary reporting and documentary review conducted for this study identified at least twelve Indonesian nationals connected to AQAP-related networks, including individuals involved in military training, facilitation, financing, propaganda, and support activities. However, this article focuses on ten analytically traceable cases because these cases provide sufficient information regarding mobility pathway, network linkage, role indication, and status of involvement. Cases with incomplete identifying data or insufficient pathway information were excluded from the core analytical matrix to maintain empirical consistency and analytical reliability (IPAC, 2024; Yin, 2018).

The use of an analytical case matrix was intended to avoid treating Indonesian involvement in AQAP as a homogeneous phenomenon. Instead, each case was examined according to five dimensions: year of involvement, mobility pathway, network linkage, role indication, and evidence base. This approach allowed the study to identify recurring patterns across cases without disclosing sensitive personal or operational details. To protect source confidentiality and prevent operational misuse, all cases were anonymized using case codes rather than personal names.

Secondary data were used to strengthen and verify the interview findings. These sources included research reports, official documents, terrorism-related court decisions, academic publications, credible media sources, and open-source intelligence (OSINT) materials related to digital network footprints, propaganda patterns, and narratives used in the mobilization of AQAP loyalists. The analysis also covered digital propaganda content across platforms, including closed communication channels and media releases relevant to AQAP networks. The use of secondary data ensured that the findings did not rely solely on informant testimony, but were also tested through documentary validation and open-source materials (Gibson, 2017; Prunckun, 2019).

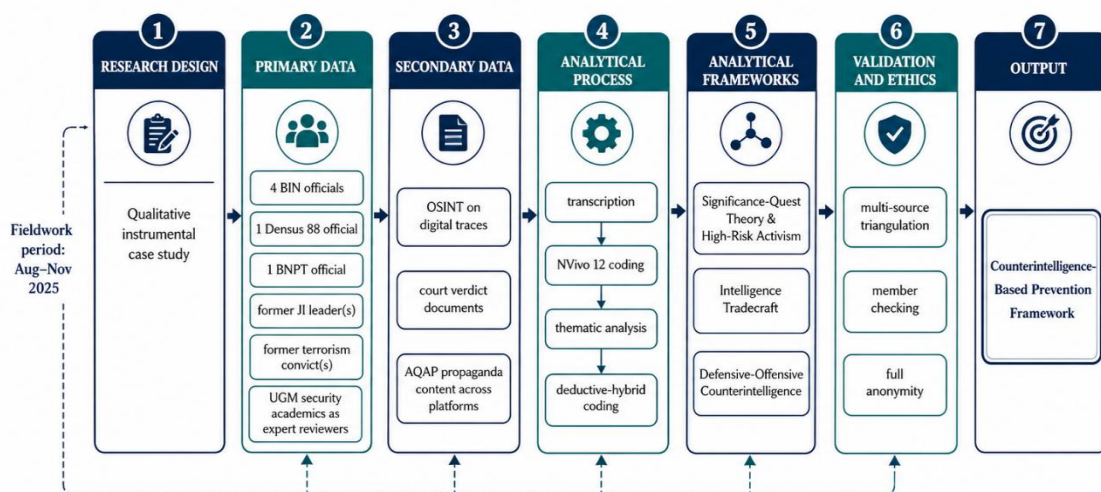
All interview data and textual documents were analyzed using NVivo 12 software. The analysis followed a six-stage thematic analysis procedure consisting of data familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining, and synthesis of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Coding was conducted through a deductive-hybrid approach based on three main analytical focuses: the driving factors of Indonesian radicalization, the operational methods or tradecraft used in clandestine mobilization to Yemen, and the counterintelligence strategies that can be employed to prevent the deployment of loyalists to the AQAP network.

The theoretical framework used in the analysis consisted of four layers. First, Significance-Quest Theory was used to examine crises of meaning, identity seeking, and the need for recognition as psychological factors driving individual involvement in extremist networks (Kruglanski et al., 2022). Second, the Theory of Participation in High-Risk Activism was used to explain individual involvement in high-risk activities through a combination of ideological identification, prior activism, social ties, and biographical availability (McAdam, 1986). Third, the concept of intelligence tradecraft was used to map administrative cover, compartmentation, closed communication, and the use of legal channels in the

clandestine mobility of non-state actors (Lowenthal, 2017; Clark, 2013; Sageman, 2004). Fourth, the counterintelligence framework was used to assess state prevention responses through the principles of detection, deception, deterrence, and neutralization, as well as the strengthening of intelligence-led decision-making (Prunckun, 2019; Ratcliffe, 2016; Johnson, 2007).

Data validity was maintained through multi-source triangulation by comparing information from security officials, former network insiders, academics, official documents, court decisions, and relevant open sources. This strategy was used to minimize subjective bias and strengthen the consistency of the findings (Patton, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Limited member checking was also conducted with selected informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the main patterns did not deviate from the empirical context conveyed during the interviews (Birt et al., 2016). The selection of informants followed the principle of data saturation, in which additional interviews no longer produced substantially new information relevant to the research questions.

Given that the study deals with terrorism networks and intelligence practices, strict ethical safeguards were applied throughout the research process. Informants were approached based on informed consent, and their identities were anonymized to protect personal safety and operational confidentiality. Sensitive operational details were generalized or omitted to prevent the disclosure of information that could compromise ongoing security operations, expose sources, or enable operational misuse. Accordingly, the findings were presented selectively and proportionally without reducing the academic accuracy of the study (Silke, 2019).



Source: Author's elaboration.

Figure 3. Research Design and Data Triangulation Process

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Analytical Matrix of Indonesian AQAP-Linked Cases

Before discussing the interaction of radicalization factors, this section first presents an analytical matrix of Indonesian nationals linked to AQAP-related pathways during the 2020–2024 period. The matrix is not intended to expose personal identities or operational details, but to demonstrate the empirical basis of the study and to identify recurring patterns across cases. Each case is anonymized using a case code and examined through five dimensions: period of involvement, main pathway, network linkage, role indication, and analytical pattern.

The matrix shows that Indonesian involvement in the AQAP ecosystem was not limited to direct combatant participation. Instead, the cases reveal a broader spectrum of roles, including propaganda dissemination, ideological mentoring, religious-social embedding, facilitation, and mobility support. This

indicates that AQAP-linked mobilization should be understood as a continuum connecting radicalization, facilitation, and mobility rather than as a single-stage process of ideological indoctrination.

Table 1. Analytical Matrix of Indonesian AQAP-Linked Cases

Case Code	Period	Main Pathway	Network Linkage	Role Indication	Analytical Pattern
WNI-01	2020	Digital propaganda exposure	Domestic ideological network	Translation/dissemination of AQAP-linked narratives	Propaganda node
WNI-02	2021	Religious education mobility	Yemen-based study circle	Ideological exposure and network access	Educational cover
WNI-03	2021	Student/religious mobility	Ma'had-linked environment	Contact with closed ideological circle	Social-religious embeddedness
WNI-04	2022	Diaspora/religious network	Overseas Indonesian-linked contact	Supportive network exposure	Diaspora exposure
WNI-05	2023	Halaqah network	Domestic intermediary	Ideological mentoring and network bridging	Facilitation node
WNI-06	2023	Religious education pathway	Yemen-based socio-religious network	Movement toward AQAP-linked ecosystem	Educational-social access
WNI-07	2024	Religious travel route	Transit-linked contact	Attempted mobility toward conflict-adjacent area	Administrative vulnerability
WNI-08	2024	Saudi Arabia–Yemen route	Cross-border intermediary	Mobility facilitated by travel/residence documents	Transit vulnerability
WNI-09	2024	Visa/residence permit pathway	Overseas network contact	Administrative access to high-risk environment	Legal-channel exploitation
WNI-10	2024	Religious travel and social contact	Facilitator-linked network	Attempted access to AQAP-related ecosystem	Mobility facilitation

Across the cases, four recurring patterns can be identified. First, AQAP-linked exposure may begin through localized digital propaganda. Second, ideological commitment is strengthened through closed socio-religious networks, including halaqah, pesantren-linked environments, and Yemen-based religious institutions. Third, physical mobility depends on trusted intermediaries and access to transnational routes. Fourth, administrative vulnerabilities related to documents, visas, residence permits, or cross-border movement can become enabling conditions for clandestine mobilization.

3.2. Dimensions and Interactions of Transnational Radicalization Factors

The findings indicate that Indonesian involvement in the AQAP ecosystem during the 2020–2024 period cannot be explained solely as a result of ideological indoctrination. Rather, the process emerged from the interaction of psychological vulnerability, ideological framing, social embeddedness, and structural mobility opportunities. These four dimensions did not operate separately, but reinforced one another within a broader ecosystem of radicalization, facilitation, and transnational mobilization.

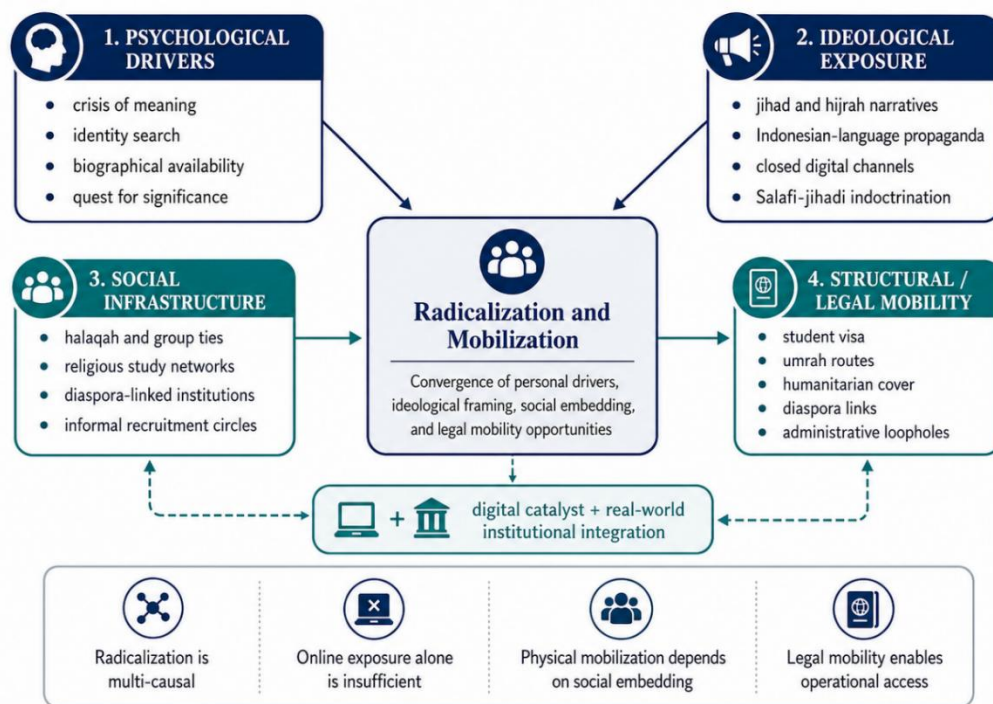
From the perspective of Significance-Quest Theory, individual vulnerability often began with a search for meaning, recognition, and personal significance, particularly among individuals experiencing identity uncertainty, social disappointment, or perceptions of injustice (Kruglanski et al., 2022). In the AQAP-related cases, this quest for meaning was reinforced by narratives of jihad, hijrah, and Muslim solidarity that framed Yemen as a legitimate arena of religious struggle. However, psychological vulnerability alone

was insufficient to generate mobilization. It became operationally relevant only when combined with ideological narratives and access to trusted social networks.

The ideological dimension functioned as a moral framing mechanism. AQAP-linked narratives did not merely provide doctrinal justification, but also offered a sense of purpose by connecting personal frustration with broader transnational grievances. Through this framing, Yemen was constructed not only as a conflict zone, but also as a symbolic space of religious duty and collective defense. This finding suggests that ideological exposure should be understood not as a linear cause of mobilization, but as a legitimizing layer that becomes stronger when embedded in social relations.

The social dimension was central in transforming ideological sympathy into practical commitment. Several cases showed connections with older ideological networks, exclusive religious study circles, halaqah environments, pesantren-linked communities, diaspora contacts, or Yemen-based religious institutions. This pattern is consistent with the Theory of Participation in High-Risk Activism, which emphasizes that participation in high-risk movements is shaped not only by ideological identification, but also by prior activism, social ties, and biographical availability (McAdam, 1986). In this context, trusted intermediaries, peer validation, and closed-group environments provided the social legitimacy and practical direction required for mobilization.

The structural dimension refers to the availability of legal or semi-legal mobility channels that could be exploited by extremist-linked actors. Religious education, umrah travel, residence permits, visas, diaspora connections, and overseas religious networks created administrative spaces that appeared legitimate on the surface but could be misused as entry points into high-risk environments. The NVivo-based thematic analysis supports this pattern, showing that codes related to religious study circles, halaqah, pesantren, diaspora, propaganda, hijrah, visas, residence permits, and legal mobility were repeatedly connected across the data.



Source: Author's elaboration based on thematic analysis.

Figure 4. Interaction Model of Indonesian Transnational Radicalization toward AQAP

Taken together, these findings show that radicalization toward AQAP was not a single-stage process moving directly from ideology to violence. Instead, it developed through a layered interaction between personal vulnerability, ideological justification, social validation, and mobility access. Digital propaganda functioned as an initial catalyst by expanding exposure to AQAP-linked narratives, but physical mobilization remained dependent on offline networks that provided trust, direction, and logistical access.

Therefore, prevention cannot rely solely on monitoring extremist content or identifying individuals with ideological sympathy. A counterintelligence-based prevention approach must also map the enabling ecosystem that connects narratives, social networks, facilitators, administrative loopholes, and transnational mobility. This implies that early detection should focus not only on individual radicalization indicators, but also on the relational and structural conditions that enable ideological exposure to develop into mobilization.

Figure 4 shows that radicalization and mobilization are not produced by a single factor, but by the convergence of personal drivers, ideological framing, social embeddedness, and structural opportunities that enable cross-border mobility. Therefore, counterintelligence-based prevention strategies should not focus solely on at-risk individuals, but also on the broader ecosystem that links motivation, networks, narratives, and mobility before these processes develop into the deployment of loyalists to conflict zones.

3.3. The Application of Intelligence Tradecraft in Clandestine Mobility

The findings indicate that the mobilization of Indonesian nationals into the AQAP ecosystem did not occur as an entirely spontaneous or individual movement. Rather, it reflected a relatively structured clandestine pattern in which non-state actors adapted several principles commonly associated with intelligence tradecraft. These patterns were visible in four main forms: administrative concealment, information compartmentation, socio-religious embedding, and layered communication (Clark, 2013; Lowenthal, 2017; Sageman, 2004).

The first pattern was administrative concealment through the use of legal or semi-legal mobility channels. In several cases, religious education, religious travel, residence permits, student status, or overseas social connections functioned as formal justifications for mobility. These channels appeared legitimate at the administrative level, but in certain cases they also created grey zones that could be exploited by extremist-linked actors. This does not suggest that religious education or religious travel is inherently suspicious; rather, the vulnerability emerged when such channels intersected with closed ideological networks, intermediary actors, and high-risk mobility destinations.

The second pattern was socio-religious embedding. Physical mobility toward Yemen was not determined solely by travel documents or individual motivation, but also by the presence of trusted networks that provided legitimacy, direction, and access. Halaqah circles, pesantren-linked environments, diaspora contacts, and Yemen-based religious institutions functioned as social infrastructures through which ideological affinity could be translated into practical mobilization. In this sense, social trust became an operational asset. It enabled extremist-linked actors to reduce uncertainty, identify potential recruits, and facilitate movement without relying on formal organizational structures.

The third pattern was information compartmentation. In several cases, mobilized individuals did not appear to possess full knowledge of the broader network structure, intermediary actors, final destinations, or subsequent stages of mobility. Information was distributed selectively according to the role and position of each individual within the network. This compartmentation reduced the risk of exposure if one node was detected and made the broader facilitation structure more difficult to map. Such a pattern demonstrates that AQAP-linked mobilization relied not only on ideological motivation, but also on operational discipline that separated recruiters, facilitators, intermediaries, and mobilized individuals.

The fourth pattern was layered communication. Open communication generally revolved around religious learning, humanitarian concern, solidarity narratives, or general expressions of religious commitment, while more restricted communication was reserved for sensitive matters related to mobility, intermediaries, and onward access. Digital channels played an important role in expanding narrative exposure and initial ideological selection, but physical mobilization remained dependent on personal trust, selective communication, and offline network validation. Therefore, digital propaganda should be understood as an enabling layer rather than a standalone driver of deployment.

The NVivo-based thematic analysis reinforced these findings. Codes related to visas, residence permits, religious study, umrah, institutions, ma'had, legal mobility, administrative access, closed networks, and communication patterns appeared repeatedly across interviews, documents, and open-source materials. These codes indicate that the mobility of Indonesian nationals toward AQAP-related environments was

closely linked to the exploitation of administrative spaces and socio-religious infrastructures rather than purely illegal border-crossing from the outset.

Taken together, these findings show that tradecraft in AQAP-linked mobilization operated through the convergence of administrative legitimacy, social trust, selective information control, and layered communication. This pattern complicates conventional counterterrorism assumptions that focus primarily on overt violent intent or illegal movement. In the counterintelligence context, the key challenge is therefore not only to identify individuals who have already shown violent intent, but also to detect the enabling ecosystem that connects ideological exposure, trusted intermediaries, administrative access, and cross-border mobility.

Understanding the tradecraft dimension is important for prevention. If mobilization operates through administrative concealment and social embedding, then prevention cannot rely solely on content monitoring or post-incident law enforcement. It requires earlier intervention points, including the mapping of facilitator networks, the verification of high-risk mobility pathways, the strengthening of administrative screening, and the integration of intelligence, immigration, diplomatic, and law enforcement data. In this sense, tradecraft analysis provides the bridge between the study's empirical findings on radicalization and the construction of a counterintelligence-based prevention framework.

3.4. Construction of an Integrative Counterintelligence Strategy Model

Based on the findings on radicalization patterns, exploitation of legal mobility channels, and the use of tradecraft in clandestine mobility to Yemen, this study constructs an integrative counterintelligence strategy model to prevent the deployment of Indonesian loyalists into the AQAP ecosystem. This model positions counterintelligence not merely as a post-incident enforcement instrument, but as a layered prevention mechanism that combines early detection, network disruption, administrative-diplomatic strengthening, and interagency data integration.

In the defensive dimension, the strategy is directed toward strengthening early detection through an Intelligence-Led Policing (ILP) approach. This approach places intelligence information at the center of risk mapping, particularly in identifying at-risk individuals, intermediary actors, travel patterns, socio-religious networks, and administrative vulnerabilities that may be exploited by extremist-linked actors (Ratcliffe, 2016). Early detection should therefore not rely solely on ideological monitoring, but must also integrate social, digital, administrative, and cross-border mobility indicators.

In the offensive dimension, the strategy is directed toward disrupting the operational capacity of facilitator networks through deterrence, deception, and neutralization (Prunckun, 2019; Johnson, 2007). Disruption should not be understood only as coercive action. It may also include restricting facilitator mobility, cutting logistical access, strengthening document verification, interrupting recruitment channels, and enhancing cooperation with authorities in destination or transit countries. This approach targets the enabling nodes that connect radicalization, facilitation, financing, travel documents, and overseas networks.

Beyond the defensive and offensive dimensions, the findings highlight the importance of administrative-diplomatic prevention. Student visas, religious travel, residence permits, and overseas religious education links should be treated not merely as administrative matters, but as strategic prevention spaces when they intersect with high-risk networks. Visa screening, institutional validation, verification of travel purposes, and cooperation with host or transit countries are therefore important instruments to prevent the misuse of legal channels as cover for clandestine mobility.

The effectiveness of this model depends heavily on the state's ability to overcome interagency data fragmentation. The findings indicate that delayed information exchange, limited interoperability, and the absence of a joint analytical mechanism weaken the prevention of transnational mobilization. Therefore, this study emphasizes the establishment of an accountable and legally grounded interagency fusion desk involving intelligence, law enforcement, immigration, diplomacy, terrorism prevention actors, and financial intelligence where relevant.

The fusion desk would function as a center for data integration, risk analysis, and response coordination. Within this model, BIN would contribute strategic intelligence collection and analysis;

Detachment 88 would support intelligence-based law enforcement; BNPT would contribute prevention and deradicalization perspectives; immigration authorities would provide travel document and border-control data; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Indonesian overseas missions would support intelligence diplomacy and institutional verification; and financial intelligence actors could assist in identifying suspicious funding patterns connected to facilitation networks. This division of roles reflects the practical implication of the present study, which emphasizes the need for a limited and gradual pilot fusion desk based on priority data exchange, shared threat perception, and interoperable intelligence inputs.

Table 2. Counterintelligence-Based Prevention Framework for AQAP-Linked Mobilization

Prevention Layer	Risk Focus	Counterintelligence Function	Main Actors	Expected Output
Early detection	At-risk individuals, extremist-linked social ties, travel patterns, digital exposure	Detection and risk mapping	BIN, Densus 88, BNPT, Immigration	Integrated risk profile
Network disruption	Facilitators, ideological mentors, logistical channels, mobility brokers	Deterrence, deception, neutralization	BIN, Densus 88, BNPT	Disrupted facilitation chain
Administrative-diplomatic screening	Student visas, residence permits, religious travel, institutional affiliation	Preventive screening and denial of misuse	Immigration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesian overseas missions	Verified mobility and reduced administrative loopholes
Intelligence diplomacy	Verification with destination and transit countries	Liaison coordination and cross-border confirmation	BIN, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, overseas missions	Timely foreign confirmation and risk alerts
Interagency fusion desk	Fragmented data on radicalization, mobility, financing, and documents	Data fusion and joint analysis	BIN, BNPT, Densus 88, Immigration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, financial intelligence actors	Joint analytical product and coordinated response

The model rests on four integrated components. First, early detection of at-risk individuals, networks, and mobility patterns. Second, disruption of facilitators, logistical channels, and administrative access exploited by extremist-linked actors. Third, strengthening administrative-diplomatic instruments through visa screening, institutional validation, and cooperation with destination and transit countries. Fourth, interagency data integration through an accountable, proportional, and legally grounded fusion desk. This model underscores that preventing AQAP-linked mobilization cannot rely solely on post-incident law enforcement, but must intervene earlier within the ecosystem that connects motivation, networks, facilitation, and transnational mobility.

Figure 5 shows that the prevention of clandestine mobility of Indonesian nationals toward AQAP should be positioned as a cross-functional process that links early detection, network disruption, administrative-diplomatic strengthening, and data integration through a fusion desk. The model emphasizes that the effectiveness of counterintelligence is not determined solely by enforcement capability, but also by the ability to identify mobility patterns, cut off facilitator access, strengthen administrative verification, and close coordination gaps before individuals move toward conflict zones.

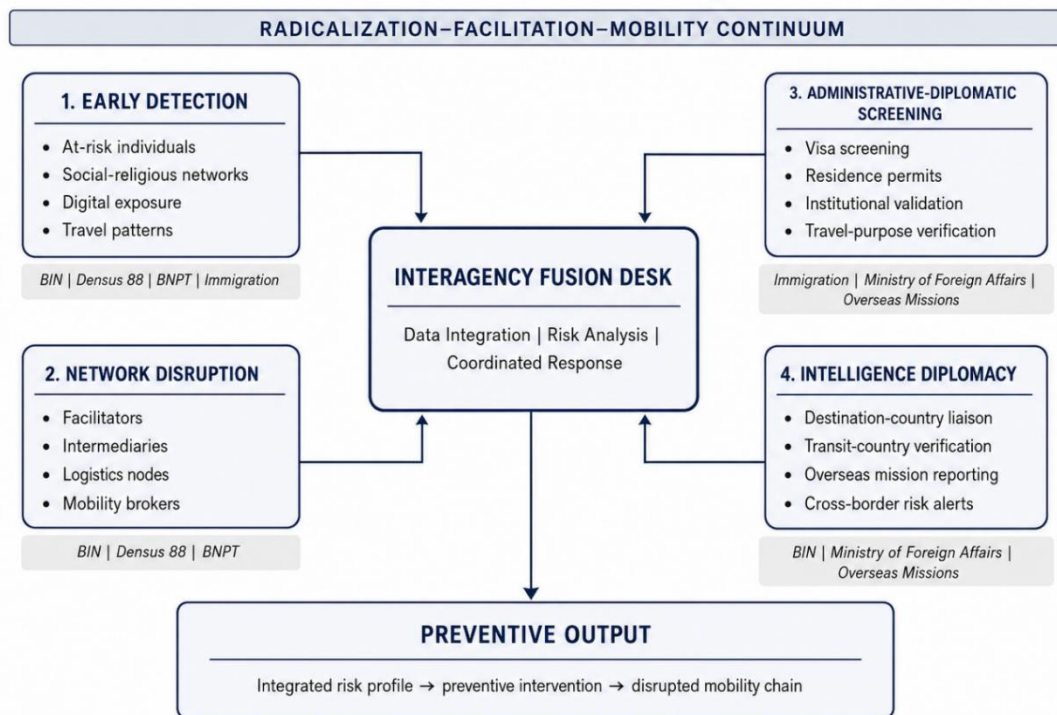


Figure 5. Counterintelligence-Based Prevention Framework for AQAP Recruitment Mitigation

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the involvement of Indonesian nationals (Warga Negara Indonesia or WNI) in the ecosystem of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen during the 2020–2024 period cannot be understood solely as a result of ideological indoctrination. Rather, it emerged from the interaction of personal crises of meaning, exposure to transnational jihadist narratives, embeddedness in socio-religious networks, and opportunities for cross-border mobility through legal or semi-legal channels. Accordingly, radicalization toward AQAP should be understood as a layered process that connects psychological, ideological, social, and structural dimensions.

Operationally, the study finds that the mobility of Indonesian nationals toward the AQAP ecosystem reflects the adaptation of tradecraft principles by non-state actors. This pattern is evident in the use of administrative concealment, information compartmentation, socio-religious and diaspora infrastructures, and layered communication. These findings show that transnational mobilization does not always occur through illegal routes, but may also exploit grey zones within legal administrative systems, particularly through religious education pathways, religious travel, residence permits, and overseas connections.

Based on these findings, this study proposes an integrative counterintelligence strategy model that positions prevention as a cross-functional process. The model rests on four main components: early detection of at-risk individuals, networks, and mobility patterns; disruption of facilitators and supporting channels; strengthening of administrative-diplomatic instruments through visa screening, institutional validation, and cooperation with destination and transit countries; and interagency data integration through an accountable and proportional fusion desk. Through this approach, counterintelligence is positioned not merely as a post-incident enforcement instrument, but as an early prevention mechanism targeting the ecosystem that connects radicalization, facilitation, and cross-border mobility.

The practical implication of this study is the need to institutionalize a pilot fusion desk involving intelligence, law enforcement, immigration, diplomacy, and terrorism prevention actors. Such a mechanism is necessary to accelerate data interoperability, improve the accuracy of risk analysis, and strengthen coordinated responses to the mobility of Indonesian nationals toward conflict-prone areas. At the same time, administrative prevention should be balanced with community-based approaches to ensure that

monitoring of religious education, religious travel, and diaspora networks does not lead to the stigmatization of particular religious communities.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of counterintelligence studies by integrating the analysis of radicalization, high-risk activism, non-state actor tradecraft, and intelligence-led prevention. Future research should further test this model in other transnational network contexts, including mobilization through digital spaces, diaspora communities, and educational institutions in different conflict-affected regions.

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