



## The Hydra Headed Monster: Jemaa Islamiyah's Likely Resurgence in Indonesia

by John Solomon and Mohamed Sadq



The first Bali Bombing in October 2002 was a watershed event in the fight against terrorism in Southeast Asia. The lethality of the attack coupled with its location in the popular tourist island of Bali was the opening salvo in a terrorist campaign which resulted in a massive crackdown on Jemaa Islamiyah (JI), the organization responsible. Last year's arrest of JI leaders Abu Dujana and Zarkasih attests to the Indonesian police's commitment to containing the terrorist threat.

Indeed, many analysts including Sidney Jones of the International Crisis Group have observed that the operations network of JI has been severely disrupted as several top leaders have been arrested (Dujana, Zarkasih, Nurjaman Ridzuan Isamuiddin aka Hambali), killed (Azahari bin Husin) or have fled and are unable to carry out leadership duties (Umar Patek and Joko Pitono aka Dulmatin).

In addition, the first Bali Bombing appears to have further weakened JI operationally by widening an ideological rift over the use of terrorist tactics in Indonesia. The faction inclined towards using terrorism in Indonesia, led by Noordin Mohamed Top, who fled to the southern Philippines, finds it acceptable to kill 'infidels' in Indonesia.

A much larger faction, on the other hand, led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the *emir* of Majelis Mujahideen Indonesia (MMI), believes that it is not necessarily acceptable to kill unbelievers in Indonesia but acceptable to kill them elsewhere.

While the damage to JI's operational muscle on the surface may paint a rosy picture of counter-terrorism efforts against JI (there have been no attacks since 2005), four factors are effectively shaping a far less sanguine future. These interlocking drivers – history, ideology, organizational structure and financial diversification – suggest strongly that the battle against Salafi Jihadism is far from over in Indonesia.

### HISTORICAL ROOTS

The first factor is historical. JI's goal of overthrowing the current secular government and establishing a caliphate based on sharia law is neither new nor unique. The goal to create an Islamic Indonesian state (Negara Islam Indonesia) has its origins in JI's progenitor, Darul Islam (DI). DI, founded in 1947, was a people's militia originally trained by the Japanese during the Second World War.

DI's stated aim was to establish an Islamic Indonesian state. During independence, it fought both the Dutch colonisers as well as Sukarno's nationalist forces. After the Dutch were ousted in 1949, DI continued its active rebellion against the Indonesian army, posing a substantial challenge to the fledgling state as various rebellions spearheaded by DI broke out across Indonesia.

DI was forced underground in 1962 after the execution of its leader and continues to exist as a banned but tolerated umbrella movement for affiliated groups. Various incarnations have emerged over the years, with some being more violent (Commando Jihad and Ring Banten), and others less so (MMI).

The means differed between groups but the aim was always the same, the establishment of an Islamic state under shariah law. Both founders of JI, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, were DI and Commando Jihad members. Many members of JI are members of DI or have relatives involved in DI. As stated, the goal of establishing an Islamic state is an old one dating back to the battle for independence of Indonesia. This fight for a caliphate is, in essence, a battle over the fundamental question of what exactly constitutes the Indonesian state, what it means to be an Indonesian and what it means to be a Muslim.

At its core, the DI-inspired movement is a nationalistic one buttressed with a messianic view of Islam which posits that it is the sole means by which mankind can achieve a just and equitable political system and way of life.

The movement's successes and failures have provided a historical wellspring from which JI has been able to draw and formulate an updated narrative applicable to current day realities.

### **IDEOLOGICAL BUOYANCY**

The second related factor is ideological. The historical nature coupled with the perceived righteousness of fighting for an Islamic state creates a narrative for present day militants to draw upon for inspiration and provides an ideological basis for its battle against the secular state.

This narrative is a clearly defined world of black and white, good versus evil, believer versus non-believer. In this narrative, a jihadi is a champion or a hero of righteousness fighting against powerful foes of Islam, namely Zionist forces (the West) and hypocritical Muslims (local governments in cahoots with the West).

The ideology draws on the Islamic concept of *cubaan* where hardships or trials must firstly be overcome to achieve success. *Cubaan* is a theological belief that every Muslim must overcome challenges and burdens put in his path by God before one can achieve a particular objective or goal.

It is only through faith and perseverance that the trial can be overcome. Hence, being outnumbered or facing numerous setbacks can be seen as part of the jihadi struggle and not seen as a defect in the cause or ideology. Rather, the seeming insurmountable odds are embraced. In this light, America's conduct of foreign policy in Afghanistan and the Middle East and the Indonesian police's crackdowns are manifestations of *cubaan* and the perfect "challenge" to the jihadi.

Defeating JI permanently therefore requires not only efficient police and intelligence services – which in effect treat symptoms but not causes – but also a "soft power" approach of winning over the hearts and minds of would be militants. Winning over a community of people however requires much time and remains a long term project. There is such an effort being led by former JI leader Nasir Abas. The extent of this ideological response appears to be a book outlining the reasons why the Bali bombers were misguided.

The weak attack on the crux of the problem – ideology -- suggests that the underpinnings of JI and its *raison d'être* will remain intact and will therefore continue to garner recruits to its cause.

### **DECENTRALISED ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

A third reason why JI will continue to flourish is the resilience it enjoys from its decentralized organizational structure. Operationally speaking, JI has evolved into a loose and decentralized organisation with each regional cell being separate and independent from other cells. The JI network is also spread out across the region with training camps located in the Philippines and Pakistan. Hence a crackdown in Indonesia has little or no effect on its training and operational capabilities. JI is essentially a hydra headed monster with each cell being able to survive and operate even as other cells are compromised.

An example of this operational resilience is the existence of a Karachi-based cell (Al-Ghuraba) setup by Hambali which is dedicated to scouting, recruiting and training future potential JI leaders. This in effect is an "officer corps" academy where young JI members with leadership potential are shipped to Karachi, Pakistan, to receive both religious and military training.

Many are then transported to Afghanistan to receive additional tactical training, with some receiving the honour of meeting Osama bin Laden himself. Several alumni have included Gun Gun Rusman Gunawan (Hambali's brother), Abdul Rahim (Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's son), Rijal Yadri bin Jumari (recently arrested and detained by Singapore) and Muhammad Jibril Abdul Rahman (son of Mohamad Iqbal Abdurrahman).

The Al-Ghuraba alumni have proven their worth with Muhammad Jibril running Ar-Rahmah Media, a website dedicated to selling jihadi related VCDs, literature, news and opinion pieces. It also has a forum and a Friendster page that provides a platform for recruitment and transmission of jihadi values and ideology to a younger generation. Abdul Rahim, the first leader of Al-Ghuraba, has never been caught and Rijal Yadri bin Jumari was finally captured after being on the run for almost seven years.

#### FINANCIAL DIVERSIFICATION

Lastly, JI's financial networks remain robust and unhindered. In terms of funding its operations, JI operates a variety of legitimate businesses selling VCDs, books, herbal medicines and foodstuff. Ordinary JI members are also required to tithe a percentage of their earnings to JI.

The less violent faction of JI headed by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir operates through the MMI, a 50,000 member strong religious organisation that campaigns for an Islamic state.

MMI has a veneer of legitimacy which allows it to manage businesses, sell publications and grant donations, all through the use of the formal financial system.

Ji members in the past have also been encouraged to engage in *fa'i*, that is, engage in criminal acts to fund their Jihad. For example, part of the Bali Bombing was financed by robbing a jewellery shop. Imam Samudra also wrote a book while in prison encouraging others to engage in hacking and online credit card fraud.

Abu Bakar Ba'asyir has endorsed this activity by stating: "You can take their blood, why not their property?"

Another concern is the financial link JI has with al-Qaida. In the past, Hambali acted as al-Qaida's node within the JI network by injecting al-Qaida's sizeable liquid assets into the group. Although Hambali has been arrested, al-Qaida possibly remains a financial source for JI, albeit greatly diminished.

Jl's close partnership with the Abu Sayyaf Group(ASG) and the al-Qaida-linked charity, the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO), provides a potential source for income.

Though IIRO has been sanctioned, according to terrorism expert Zachary Abuza, it has merely changed its working name and continues to support terrorist outfits within the region.

## CONCLUSION

As explained above, there are four drivers that strongly suggest that the Salafi Jihadist movement in some shape or form will continue to remain a threat to the region in general and to Indonesia in particular. Historically and ideologically, the jihadi narrative continues to be an appealing one, especially when victory results in a caliphate and death results in heaven. Either way, the jihadi is rewarded.

Organizationally, Jl has prepared for leadership renewal and, due to its decentralised structure, it is capable of absorbing blows from the authorities. It is clear that it has the means by which to reform and regroup. Its funding channels continue to be diverse and largely uninterrupted.

Even if Jl fails to achieve an Islamic state in Indonesia, history has shown that the DI ideology continues to evolve and in all likelihood will inspire more forms of militancy well into the future.

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