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The State of Jemaah Islamiyah: Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia Five Years After Bali

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Introduction

It has been five years since the devastating terrorist attacks by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Bali killed some 202 people, making it the most lethal terrorist attack since 9/11. In the three years that followed, JI perpetrated attacks on an annual basis. Since the most recent attacks in October 2005, JI has suffered a string of defeats, including the November 2005 killing of its master bomb-maker, Dr. Azahari bin Husin. Since then, JI has not been able to perpetrate a major terrorist attack against western targets, though it has reached advanced stages of planning before being thwarted. In June 2007, JI's two senior-most leaders, Abu Dujana and Nu'aim, were arrested, a blow that raised questions about the group's future.

This article, the first in a series on the state of terrorism and insurgency in Southeast Asia, will identify JI's prospects in the coming years and explain the group's resiliency.

Background on JI

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is a radical Salafist jihadist organization founded on the principles of being a clandestine organization committed to turning Indonesia and the rest of Muslim Southeast Asia into an Islamic state (*Nusantara Raya*). The group was founded in 1992-1993 by two former members of Darul Islam, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who had become frustrated with the organization's quiet approach to implementing an Islamic state and the gradual political emasculation of Islamists following the 1965 coup by Maj. Gen. Suharto.* JI was established with the explicit intent of being a covert organization that would bring down the secular state through force and political struggle.

JI's primary organizational and philosophical document, the *Pedoman Umum Perjuangan al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah* (General Guidebook for the Struggle of Jemaah Islamiyah), known as the PUPJI, outlines the role of clandestine cells (*tanzim sir*) and describes the struggle using the language of guerilla warfare. JI's leaders sought the approval of al Qaeda leadership in the group's founding and received financial and material support from al Qaeda. Several of JI's top leaders were concurrently members of al Qaeda, and its top operatives were trained in al Qaeda's Afghan camps beginning in the late-1990s. JI established two paramilitaries, the Laskar Mujihidin (Malukus) and the Laskar Jundullah (Central Sulawesi) that engaged in sectarian bloodletting immediately following the fall of Indonesia's President Suharto in May 1998.

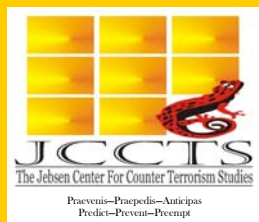
JI was quick to take advantage of the collapse of the authoritarian and overly-centralized secular state. The organization began its bombing campaign in 2000, and since the Bali attacks of October 2002, JI has perpetrated roughly one major attack a year and employed eight suicide bombers (JW Marriott, Jakarta, August 2003; the Australian Embassy, Jakarta, September 2004; three restaurants, Bali, October 2005). Together, these attacks made JI the most consistently lethal al Qaeda-affiliated group in the world from 2002-2005.

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Jl's ideology focuses on the concept of distinct in and out groups, beyond *Darul Islam* and *Darul al-Harb* and on the concepts of *al-wala wal bara* (loyalty and non-loyalty), in which they pledge *bai'ah*, an oath of allegiance to their *amir*. Jl engages in the Wahhabi practice of *takfir*—labeling “unbelieving” Muslims as non-Muslims—and encourages *hijrah*, or migration and a total disassociation from non-Muslims or apostates. Jl has a broad definition of defensive *jihad*, and believes that the killing of Westerners is justified because Islam as a religion is under attack and Muslim lands are being occupied. Muslims who are killed collaterally become martyrs. *Jihad* has an explicitly violent connotation within Jl, and is deemed the “sixth pillar” of Islam. Jl's ideology encourages and praises *isytiyyhad*, or martyrdom, and promises the rewards of *jannah* (paradise) for those who die carrying out Allah's deeds, especially through *istimata*, or suicide attacks.

Jl and the Regional War on Terror

Jl has been heavily targeted since the war on terror began in Southeast Asia. More than 400 members have been arrested, and Indonesia alone has prosecuted over 250 militants, including many of its top leaders and operatives. Its regional system of cells (*mantiqis*) has been eviscerated, and overall command and control has significantly broken down. Jl's capabilities have been significantly downgraded, yet Jl remains a remarkably resilient organization, and one with a very long-term agenda.

In 2005, Noordin Mohammad Top announced the formation of a new group, Tandzim Qoedatal Jihad (TQJ), which represents a Jl faction with a decidedly anti-Western, pro-bombing agenda. It is not clear the degree to which the TQJ lies within the formal Jl structure, and it is possible that the announcement was simply intended to confuse the security services. Nor is it clear which members are in the TQJ, as several have ties with of the more traditional side of Jl that focused on sectarian conflicts (i.e. Zulkarnaen). Arrests of eight Jl members in Java in March 2007 led to the seizure of two large caches of explosives, small arms, detonators, and chemicals, further indicating that Jl retains the capacity and intent to cause devastating attacks.

Explaining the Resiliency

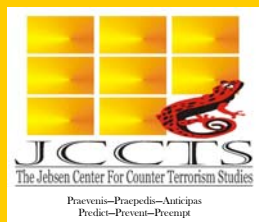
Jl is a manageable threat, especially in the short term. It is unlikely that the group is capable of perpetrating attacks on Western targets at the same levels it was from 2002-2005. In addition to exogenous variables, there are six factors that must be understood to determine Jl's renewed strength and the degree to which it poses a threat to regional security in the short to medium term:

1. *Organizational Dynamics*

There are roughly fifteen very hardened Jl leaders still at large, some with significant organization skills (Noordin Muhammad Top, Umar Patek) or technical/ military capabilities (Zulkarnaen, Dulmatin), and a cadre who have regrouped on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, where they are protected by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Dulmatin, Umar Patek, Zulkifli bin Hir). Others have longstanding ties to al Qaeda and its financing mechanisms (Parlindigan Siregar, Aris Munandar, Zulkifli Marzuki). These leaders represent all points along the socioeconomic and educational spectrum; there is no single profile of Jl members or leaders.

The top-down organizational structure outlined in the PUPJI, with its broader system of regional *mantiqis*, is no longer operational. Jl is now a very horizontal organization comprised of many autonomous and compartmentalized cells. Noordin Mohammad Top wrote an eighty-two-page tract based on the theoretical model espoused by Abu Musab al-Suri, al Qaeda's leading theorist, on how to establish loosely-affiliated jihadi cells. Abu Dujana told CNN in a jailhouse interview, “it [Jl] will continue to exist and continue to move on with its plans ... When a part of it is cut off, [in this case] the head is cut off, there will be a replacement. It's only natural.”

The regional *mantiqi* structure has been taken apart, and current Jl documents describe an Indonesia-centric organization. Beneath the leadership body, the *Markaz*, are now four



sections: Religious Training, *Tarbiyah* Education, Logistics, and *Sariyah*, or military operations. *Sariyah* was divided into four regions on the island of Java, known as *Ishobas*. In addition, there were three geographical commands for Indonesia: the West Area *Mantiqi*, the East Area *Mantiqi*, and the Poso *Mantiqi* (discussed below). This geographic focus signifies that Indonesia is JI's clear area of operations and interest at present.

Recruitment into JI is based on trust, and the most important determinants are kinship (siblings, spouses, and children), mosque, madrassah, friendship, and recruitment through participation in sectarian conflict. JI understands the importance of operational security and compartmentalization. Indeed, Noordin Mohammad Top's tract includes a chapter on steps to take if a brother has been arrested.

2. Ideological Appeal: Islam Is Under Attack

JI has done a very good job in broadening its ideological appeal, and increasingly people support both its means and ends. JI's message is very basic and focuses on a few key issues that have broad resonance: Islam is under attack; the "war on terror" is anti-Muslim; Americans are aggressive, occupy Muslim lands, and kill Muslim civilians; the West props up apostate (*murtad*) regimes; it is a religious obligation (*fard ayn*) to wage jihad; and Muslim lands must be defended against foreign influence and occupation. Mukhlas has broadened the concept of a "defensive jihad," which has allowed JI to co-opt parallel networks, such as using DI cells for certain operations.

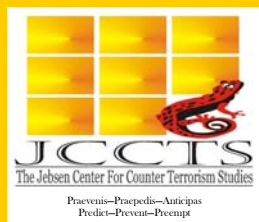
Public opinion polling conducted by the Indonesia Survey Institute in September and October 2006 found that 17.4 percent of the respondents supported JI's use of violence to establish an Islamic state. A similar number, 16.1 percent, actively supported the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), JI's overt civil society affiliate. Most alarming, when asked if they supported the actions of Imam Samudra, who is now awaiting a firing squad for his role in the Bali bombing, nine percent of the respondents said "yes." The pollsters concluded that some 10 percent of the randomly selected respondents "approved the bombings conducted ... in Bali with the excuse of defending Islam," and that "jihad that has been understood partially and practiced with violence is justified by around one in 10 Indonesian Muslims."

While the Pew Center for People and the Press' 2005 polling data showed support for violent jihad had fallen from 27 percent in August 2004 to 15 percent in 2005, while those who said violence can never be justified grew from 54 percent to 66 percent, the Pew survey had one fascinating number that few analysts have latched onto: the number of Indonesians who believed their religion is "under attack" grew from 15 percent to over 80 percent. This figure is significant, as scholars Dr. Christine Fair and Hussain Haqqani have found that the single greatest indicator of why people support suicide terrorism is the degree to which they believe their religion is under attack.

3. Ability to Learn

JI has demonstrated an ability to learn from past operations and from the experience of other organizations. The *General Manual for Operations*, a section of the PUPJI, details the four-stages of operations: 1) Planning, 2) Execution, 3) Reporting, and 4) Evaluation. Emphasis is placed on education, meticulous planning, and learning from past acts, including mistakes.

JI's recent tactical shift from large truck bombs to small backpack bombs could be explained by a shortage of materials or simply a desire to increase the tempo of attacks, but it could also demonstrate learning—a desire to evade counter-measures put in place by the police. Dr. Azahari's bomb designs are written with dissemination in mind. They are simple and easily understandable, even for those with a simple Koranic education. JI members realize they have few resources and are confronting powerful states, and that they must therefore be adaptive. Evidence garnered in raids in 2007 suggest that JI was preparing a campaign of targeted assassination—a strategy requiring few resources that has been successfully employed in the outer islands in the past few years.



4. *Sectarian Bloodletting*

As mentioned above, JI has designated Poso, Central Sulawesi as a military *mantiqi*, a fact that security services should take seriously. Clearly, the JI is out to undermine the Malino Accords. This strategy is an unmistakable reprisal of the “*uhud* project” of 1998-2001, in which JI sought to establish *hijrah*, a secure base area governed by *sharia* where forces could train and base themselves for outward attacks. JI seeks to provoke attacks based on its broadened definition of a defensive jihad. Some contend that there are deep factional rifts in JI between those who advocate sectarian bloodletting—which targets the “near enemy”—and those who want to attack the West, or the “far enemy.” However, these strategies need not be mutually exclusive—they can instead be seen as tactical rather than strategic shifts. It is possible to pursue these strategies simultaneously, and they may even be mutually reinforcing. The organization is also cognizant that such sectarian bloodletting does not put international pressure on Indonesian authorities to crack down, as do attacks on Western targets.

To that end, there has been an alarming up-tick in attacks, including bombings, targeted assassinations, and raids on military and police facilities. Since October 2004, there have been more than 30 successful bombings, resulting in the deaths of forty-eight people. Most were small and a handful of larger bombs killed the majority of the victims. Police found, seized or defused 260 IEDs. There have been more than 60 bombings since the Malino peace agreement was signed on March 12, 2001. More than twenty-one people, including five police, were gunned down, and most infamously, militants beheaded three Hindu school-girls. Most of the bombs are quite small, and three were responsible for almost half the casualties.

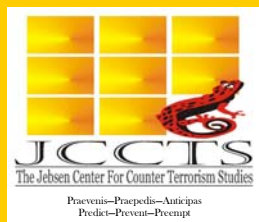
Security forces have been trying to cope with the problem. On January 22, 2007, government forces responded to a large number of armed militants amassing near Poso. The raid set off a gun battle that killed fifteen suspected fighters and one officer. In all, seventeen suspected terrorists were killed in clashes with the police during the month of January. Over ten people were arrested, yet more than fifty suspected militants were able to escape. Low-level attacks continued throughout 2007. Attacks, including the beheadings of three school-girls, are meant to undermine confidence in the state.

5. *The Inverse Triangle*

Since late 2004, JI has adopted a relatively new strategy to both build up its popular support and forge greater links to Islamist parties and organizations: good deeds, social work, and charity—what I refer to as the “inverse triangle.” The inverse triangle is an organizational design, most famously employed by the Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas, in which most of a group’s activities are overt, such as charitable work, while only a small component of the organization remains a clandestine terrorist cell.

Previously, JI embedded members in or co-opted two Saudi charities (Al Haramain and the International Islamic Relief Organization, or IIRO) and their Indonesian counterparts (KOMPAK and the Medical Emergency Relief Charity, or MERC) that were used to support militant activities. While JI benefited from these relations, they were always ancillary organizations created solely to assist jihadist activities. This strategy is changing. The humanitarian catastrophe caused by the December 2004 tsunami that killed more than 165,000 people raised the profile of three militant Islamist organizations and charities linked to JI: the MMI, the Laskar Mujihidin, and MERC. All of these organizations had been active in the sectarian bloodletting from 1998 to 2001, but they were in retreat following the October 2002 Bali bombing.

Following the June 2006 earthquake in Java, the MMI received a contract from the World Food Programme (WFP) to help deliver 95 tons of food to victims. Australian and American diplomatic pressure forced the WFP to cancel the contract, as JI co-founder Ba’asyir was designated as a global terrorist by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and proscribed under the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1267 Committee on April 13, 2006. The MMI’s acting chairman, Abu Jibril, was designated on January 22, 2003. Technically it is illegal for



Ba'asyir, Jibril, or any organization connected to them to raise money, and governments are obliged under international law to seize all of their assets.

In the coming years, JI will spend significant material and human resources on overt activities for four key reasons. First, there have been token arrests and releases of key leaders, for whom militancy is now simply an unavailable course of action. Moreover, they have experience in running JI's overt arms in the past. Second, the Indonesian government has tolerated JI's overt activities in the belief that its leaders can be weaned from violence—that it is better to have them involved in overt and non-violent activities, which are welcomed by the state, than to leave them to covert and subversive activities. Third, few politicians are willing to expend the political capital or incur the wrath of the Islamist parties to try to halt their activities. Fourth, JI wants to emulate the Prosperous Justice Party, the fastest-growing Indonesian political party, which increased its share of the vote from under two percent in 1999 to almost eight percent in 2004. The Prosperous Justice Party's success is attributable in large part to its social welfare program, not a call for *sharia*.

In short, JI has taken advantage of an opening at the same time that militancy has become counterproductive and as political will to take on the terrorist infrastructure waned. JI's emphasis on *da'wah* and charity will make JI more durable over the long term. While the Indonesian government has shown remarkable resolve in prosecuting those directly involved in terrorist acts, it has not targeted JI's social networks. Inexplicably, JI is still not criminalized, and mere membership is not a crime.

Indonesia has defaulted in its obligations to both freeze the assets and ban fundraising of those on the UNSC's 1267 list. While the government announced that "As a responsible member of the UN, we will follow Resolution No. 1267, which obliges us to ban those on the list from traveling," it made no mention of Indonesia's concurrent financial obligations. Jibril and Ba'asyir continue to fundraise, as does Aris Munandar, who was similarly designated but nevertheless continues to lead KOMPAK's operations. While the Indonesian branch of Al Haramain was designated on January 22, 2004, it is operating under a new name. There is also little evidence that the Indonesians have seized any of the assets or halted the activities of the IIRO, which was designated on August 3, 2006.

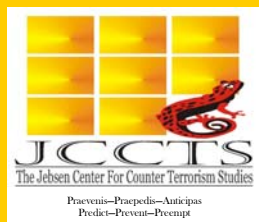
That two of JI's four sections under its 2006 re-organization are focused on Education and Tarbiyah Education should be a clear indicator that JI is going to focus on *da'wah* and religious education, which will be legally protected. This unwillingness to take on the terrorist infrastructure is both regrettable and negligent. JI has a very long-term timetable. By pursuing overt strategies, JI is able to forge closer ties with Islamists who might otherwise eschew their violence. JI is thus no longer seen as a radical fringe group, though its agenda has not changed. There is scant evidence that JI can be weaned off of terrorism.

6. *Mindanao*

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a Philippine Muslim secessionist organization, has given sanctuary and training facilities to JI since 1996. Though the group has always focused on the "near enemy," it was willing to reach out to groups that advocated attacks on the "far enemy" for rational reasons. The MILF support has greatly diminished since 2001, but JI members arrested in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines since 2004 have all confirmed that some training is continuing, albeit at a lower rate. In March and April 2006, Malaysian officials arrested a twelve-man cell that was responsible for providing logistics and transportation between Indonesia and the Philippines.

Following an attempted November 2004 bombing by Philippine armed forces of an MILF safe house where top MILF hardliners, JI members, and a leader of the Abu Sayyaf were meeting, MILF leadership expelled the two most well-known JI militants, Dulmatin and Umar Patek, who retreated to Jolo Island and have since been protected by the Abu Sayyaf.

Many hardliners in the MILF have little confidence in the government or the peace process and simply do not want to sever ties to the international jihadist community. The MILF



maintains ties with JI at a low enough level that they are plausibly deniable. While there have been calls from some quarters in the U.S. government and from within the region to proscribe the MILF as a foreign terrorist organization, it would be a stumbling block to the peace process between the MILF and Philippine government. The successful conclusion of the peace process would mitigate any need for the MILF to accord JI protection.

At present, the Abu Sayyaf Group's ties with some five JI members under the leadership of Dulmatin and Umar Patek is not in doubt. There are larger questions of whether the two have been separated from other JI leaders in Indonesia following the August 2005 arrest of Abdullah Sunata (the central Java cell leader in charge of liaison with the JI cells in Mindanao), or from JI cells in central Mindanao, now headed by the Malaysian national Zulkifli bin Hir.

As the MILF-Philippine peace process continues to stagnate, with no resolution in sight, the hardliners will be vindicated. Moreover, the need to maintain ties to the international jihadist community—including JI—will remain a rational choice.

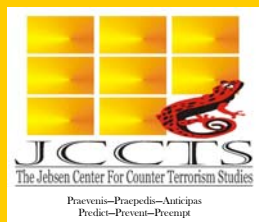
Success in the Fight Against JI

JI is operationally a shadow of its former self, and the short-term threat posed by the group has been significantly mitigated. There are three factors that can be cited in the group's weakening.

First, Indonesian security officials finally broke free of political restraints and were able to do their job following the 2002-2003 bombings. They quickly developed a cadre of highly skilled and disciplined counter-terrorist police, known as Densus-88. Densus-88—or Detachment 88—is exceptionally well funded and has a training center in Semarang, sophisticated forensics and signals intelligence capabilities, and disciplined and honest officers who are exceptionally well paid by Indonesian standards. The government has focused on police and intelligence responses, not military solutions. In general, counter-terrorist operations across Southeast Asia have led to the development and professionalization of legal and security institutions.

Second, there is now a historically unprecedented degree of security cooperation amongst the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. While there is still a ways to go before cooperation is institutionalized at a mid-bureaucratic level that does not require high-level political interference, information sharing is conducted within reasonable time frames. Perhaps the most noticeable sign of cooperation has been in patrolling the tri-nation maritime border of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, which has proven to be JI's Achilles' Heel. On the Philippine front, Australia donated four coast guard craft and pledged thirty small maritime craft that will further assist local efforts. From 2002 through 2005, Philippine naval forces interdicted 5,000 illegal entries; though most were smugglers, this vigilance is also having a deterrent capability for terrorist activity. There has also been enhanced cooperation with foreign counterparts—in particular, the United States and Australia. Both nations have stepped up not just their liaison, but also their training and operational capabilities in the region.

Third, the Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean governments have done a very good job at trying to rehabilitate or disengage members of JI. Malaysia and Singapore have released almost forty percent of their JI detainees—albeit under close supervision. While the number in Indonesia is lower, the Indonesians have had greater success in turning senior members of JI, who are now leading the rehabilitation efforts for lower-level cadres. The three governments are acutely aware that the battle against JI and similar groups is an ideological struggle, and they recognize the need to create a counter-narrative to JI's ideology.



ENDNOTES:

*Darul Islam (DI) was founded in 1947 by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwiryo and its espoused goal was to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia (*Negara Islam Indonesia*). To that end, Indonesia's anti-colonial war against the Dutch was in reality a triangular war, with Kartosuwiryo's forces battling Sukarno's nationalists, as well as the Dutch. Kartosuwiryo was captured and executed in 1962, and the group fell into disarray and factionalized. Under Suharto's New Order (1965-1998), DI in some way paralleled the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood under Anwar Sadat. Though the organization was illegal, it had become non-violent and individual membership was quietly tolerated by the regime. JI is a direct offshoot of DI, and many JI members are the children of DI members. JI has also been able to effectively tap into DI networks for operations, including the JW Marriott bombing in Jakarta in August 2003, which has extended the group's reach. In many ways DI is the foundation upon which JI has been built, though it is clear that many—but not all—in DI reject the al Qaeda strategy of targeting the "far enemy."

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