

## **Sectarian Bloodletting in Indonesia's Troubled Sulawesi and Maluku Provinces: Jemaah Islamiyah's New Lease on Life**

**By Zachary Abuza**

Since the Bali bombings of 12 October 2002, the Indonesian government has prosecuted a sustained and successful campaign against the regional terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) which has effectively thrown the organization into crisis. More than 400 members have been arrested, and Indonesia alone has prosecuted over 250 militants, including many top leaders and operatives; its regional system of cells (*mantiqis*) has been eviscerated, and overall command and control has significantly broken down. JI currently consists of semi-autonomous cells, organized horizontally, whose capabilities have been significantly degraded.

Notwithstanding government successes, however, JI remains a remarkably resilient organization, and one with a very long-term agenda. It has sought to regroup through a combined campaign of overt social welfare and proselytizing (*da'wah*) activities, while establishing a rear base area in the southern Philippines through alliances with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Abu Sayyaf Group. It is also involved in small arms training in Java, according to two members arrested in a late-March 2007 raid that led to the capture of eight militants and netted two large caches of explosives, including, 730kg of explosive materials, 45kg of TNT, 200 detonators, circuitry, and small arms and ammunition.

Less understood, however, has been JI's role in fomenting sectarian violence in Central Sulawesi and Maluku. There has been an alarming increase in attacks in these provinces, including bombings, targeted assassinations, and raids on military/police facilities. This recrudescence of violence has been far less of a priority for Jakarta, which has tended to be largely re-active in dealing with the problem.

### **Before Bali**

While Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country and over 80 percent of its 225 million people are Muslim, nearly two thirds of that population is concentrated on the islands of Java and Sumatra. The outer islands of the 3,000-mile long archipelago have sizeable, and often majority, populations of the country's ethnic and religious minorities (mainly Hindu and Christian). Between 1965 and 1985 the ethnic balance in the outer islands was upset by President Suharto's policy of *transmigrasi* – forced relocation of Muslims mainly from the over-populated islands of Java and Madura to the less-populated outer islands. Over time, Christian and Hindu dominance of local politics and the economy was eroded causing tensions. The fall of Suharto in May 1998 and subsequent collapse of military control of civilian politics, known as *dwi fungsi*, resulted in an eruption of sectarian violence across Indonesia's outer islands.

JI did not start these conflicts, but they were very quick to take advantage of them. While JI was founded in 1992-93, it did not engage in any terrorist activities until 2000. In that time it developed a network of madrassas and cells, dispatched members to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Mindanao for training, established front companies and recruited new members. Much of its leadership, as well as Al Qaeda advisors, such as Omar al-Faruq who were based in either Malaysia or the southern Philippines, returned to Indonesia following Suharto's fall. JI formed two paramilitaries to participate in the sectarian bloodletting, the Laskar Mujahidin in the Malukus, and the Laskar Jundullah in Sulawesi. While other groups such as the Laskar Jihad with some 3,000 white-robed members attracted more media attention, they had no military skills or training. By contrast, JI operatives were able to procure small arms, automatic rifles and bomb-making material from colleagues in the southern Philippines. Top JI militants, fresh out of Al Qaeda training in Mindanao changed the tide of the conflict in the Malukus.

Abdulrahman Iqbal, better known as Abu Jibril, JI's second in command, headed the Laskar Mujihidin. His lieutenant on the ground was Fadillah Haris, a leading JI member in the region, whose daughter became the wife of Omar al-Faruq, Al Qaeda's pointman in Southeast Asia, Omar al-Faruq. Jibril was arrested in May 2001 in Malaysia for his militant activities. Agus Dwikarna founded the Laskar Jundullah as the armed wing of his Committee to Implement Sharia in South Sulawesi, a JI front organization operating openly.

The 1998-2001 period was known by JI as the "uhud project" in which JI sought to establish *hijrah*, a secure base area (*qoidah aminah*) governed by *sharia* where they could train and from where they could spread their activities. JI used these paramilitaries to recruit new members, to inculcate a Manichean worldview and give them the opportunity to defend their religion. JI used the paramilitaries to discredit the Indonesian state, which in their eyes was not coming to the defense of fellow Muslims. Al Qaeda dispatched a leading propagandist to make VCDs of the jihad to recruit and fundraise. JI had established a military training camp in the jungle outside of the troubled town of Poso. It also allowed them to forge a common cause with overt Islamist organizations in society, groups such as Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia (DDII), the Ulama's Council of Indonesia (MUI), Mujihidin Council of Indonesia (MMI) and other organizations that have endorsed the sectarian conflicts and encouraged militants to defend Muslim interests and defeat Christian secessionist aspirations, in particular the Republic of the South Malucas Movement, which was emboldened by East Timor's successful campaign for independence.

While JI's paramilitaries were not large, probably no more than 500 men, their military training, discipline and aggressiveness changed the nature of the conflict. In all, between 6-9,000 people were killed and thousands more fled their homes.

The Indonesian government was finally able to quell the violence by early 2002. On 13 February 2002, some seventy representatives of Christian and Muslim militias signed the Second Malino Accord; notably absent were representatives of the JI-linked groups. Among other things, the 11-point accord called for the disarming of all militias and the expulsion of outside forces from the region.

A tenuous peace held until mid-2004. Reeling from a string of arrests following bombings in 2002 (Bali), 2003 (the JW Marriott hotel, Jakarta) and 2004 (the Australian Embassy, Jakarta) many in JI began to question the efficacy of the Al Qaeda line, which brought foreign pressure on the Indonesian government to crack down on the organisation. They began to articulate what might be described as a 'neo-Darul Islam' return to sectarian conflict as a means of motivating radical Muslims once again to take up arms in defence of Islam.

At the same time, the pro-bombing faction also saw the tactical utility of sectarian violence to facilitate the recruitment of a new generation of members. The death of JI's chief bomb-maker, Dr. Azahari bin Hussin, and the capture of his cache of explosives in November 2005, was clearly a setback for JI, which in 2006 was unable to perpetrate a major terrorist attack for the first time since 2002. While the seizure of the caches of explosives in March 2007 demonstrate that JI has not abandoned its campaign of targeting western interests, sectarian violence has clearly taken on greater importance.

### **Undermining the Malino Accords**

Since the first Malino accord was signed on 12 March 2001, there have been more than 60 bombings, and the tempo has increased since October 2004, since when there have been at least 28 successful bomb attacks, resulting in the deaths of 48. More than 21 people, including five police, and several Christian pastors have been gunned down. While not amounting to a dramatic surge in violence, attacks have continued a steady rate that effectively destabilizes these two regions. Attacks can be divided into four dis-

tinct categories: bombings, assassinations, raids on police/army posts, and arson attacks/pogroms.

### ***1. Bombings***

The death toll from bombings has been quite small with two incidents responsible for half of all bomb-related fatalities. The most lethal attacks were the bombing of a mini-van in a Poso market which killed six and wounded several others in November 2004; and simultaneous blasts in Tentena that killed 22 and injured more than 30 in May 2005. However, most bombings, such as the August 2005 blast in a crowded market in Ambon that injured nine, have not caused fatalities.

Churches and Hindu temples have been singled out for attack and since October 2004 six places of worship have been bombed. In October 2004 15 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were planted in a Christian church in Ambon but were discovered before they could be detonated. On 30 September 2006 a bomb was placed outside of a church in Poso. Most recently, on 23 January 2007, Police in Central Sulawesi removed a bomb from an Adventist Church amid fears that the region was entering a new phase of religious strife. Another target of small bombings have been Christians who have returned to their homes following the Malino Accords. On 5 February 2006, for example, police found three bombs in a refugee centre in Ambon that was resettling Christians who had fled from 1998-2001.

Some 260 IEDs have been recovered, including a cache of 123 discovered in a cemetery near Poso in October 2004; and 95 recovered during a raid on a safe-house used by Islamic militants in Ambon on 28 March 2005. In November 2005, another cache was seized in Central Sulawesi.

IEDs used in the Maluku and Central Sulawesi have been generally small and unsophisticated. The majority have been small pipe-bombs, approximately 15cm long, 3cm wide and relying on black-powder. Nails and bolts have often been packed around the devices to increase the shrapnel effect. On several occasions, militants have used mortar rounds boosted with ball bearings. Devices based on ammonium nitrate have been increasingly deployed, but have remained small. In January 2006, one bomb consisted of potassium chlorate, sulfur and aluminum. Most of the detonators have been blasting caps affixed to simple timing devices. On no occasion have more sophisticated triggering mechanisms, such as cell phones, been used. On 10 February 2006, a militant was arrested in Kalimantan smuggling 3,000 Indian-manufactured detonators and more than 1,700 meters of fuse from Malaysia's Sarawak State. His arrest led authorities to a woman in Pare-Pare, South Sulawesi, who was found with 19 sacks of ammonium nitrate, 597 detonators and eight kilograms of potassium chlorate.

### ***2. Targeted Killings***

Most of those killed in sectarian bloodletting have been gunned down indiscriminately, but other victims have been carefully targeted with a view to provoking a backlash from the government and Christian community. On 5 August 2005, two men, both prosecution witnesses in an upcoming trial over the ongoing violence in Poso, were shot dead. Militants also killed a human rights lawyer, Ferry Silalahi on 26 May 2004. On 16 October 2006, an outspoken Christian pastor, Rev Irianto Kongkoli, who led the demonstrations against the government's execution of three Christian militia leaders, was gunned down in Palu, Central Sulawesi, pushing tension in the province to a new high. The evidence against the three was at best weak and hardly warranted the death sentence, but the sentence was widely seen as a government attempt to balance the execution of the three Bali bombers, whose sentence has been delayed since August 2006. The execution of the three provoked widespread protests across Sulawesi. Two Muslims were killed the following day in mob-justice. Soon after, a female pastor, Susianti Tinulele, was also assassinated.

There have also been some shocking attacks in Central Sulawesi, such as the beheadings of three school-girls on 29 October 2005 or the two women killed by machete-wielding assailants on 19 November

2005. That month, two schoolgirls from Poso were shot in the face at close range. These attacks are simply meant to terrorize the community.

### ***3. Raids on Police and Army Posts***

There have been a number of maritime assaults, such as the February 2005 attack in which gunmen in motorboats attacked a beachside café in Ambon killing two. These attacks were seen as practice runs for a number of more sophisticated attacks on police and army posts. On 16 May 2005, six to eight militants raided a paramilitary police (Brimob) post on Seram Island in the Maluku, killing five police and three civilians. The attackers arrived in speedboats and killed the police with shots to the head, suggesting a degree of training. As the Maluku police chief asserted, "I have long states that the incidents were the work of well-trained people and I was right. They are civilians with extraordinary capabilities. But they also use local people in carrying out their missions. They have relations with a number of terrorists currently wanted by the security authorities, like Dr. Azahari."

### ***4. Arson attacks/sectarian-cleansing***

The final category of attack involving arson and pogroms against Christians has been widespread across Sulawesi. For example, on 24 April 2005, a gang of Muslim "kommandos" torched houses in a Christian community, in Mamasa, West Sulawesi, killing six. The regency of Mamasa has been plagued by sectarian-fueled arson attacks since the government divided the regency of Polewali Mamasa into two, leaving three Muslim districts within the majority-Christian regency of Mamasa. On 25 May 2005, clashes erupted in West Tenggara Regency in the Maluku, killing three people and injuring more than 50 others.

### **Who is Behind the Attacks?**

While this level of violence is not exceptionally high, it is troubling because JI and several splinter groups are behind much of it, and are using sectarian conflict to regroup. JI has always encouraged members to establish their own regional organizations with varying degrees of covertness. In the Maluku, the primary JI front remains Mujahidin Ambon. In Sulawesi, a number of JI affiliates are active of which the most important is KOMPAK Kayamanya, which is sometimes referred to as Mujahidin KOMPAK or Tanah Runtuh. (Tanah Runtuh refers to a slum area of Poso besides a radicalized madrassah.)

KOMPAK ( an acronym from Komite Aksi Penanggulangan Akibat Krisis/ Action Committee for Crisis Response) emerged in 1999 in response to the sectarian bloodletting that erupted following the fall of Suharto. An independent offshoot of the Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia (Islamic Proselytising Board of Indonesia/ DDII), the group projects itself as a legitimate humanitarian charity and received considerable financial assistance from Saudi charities, notably the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and Al Haramain. However, the Indonesian offices of both charities were proscribed by the UNSC 1267 Committee responsible for halting terrorist financing terrorism and, nominally at least, were shut down on 22 January 2004 and 3 August 2006 respectively.

KOMPAK itself has 13 offices spread around Indonesia, mainly in sectarian conflict zones. By 2002, three or four of the directors of its regional offices were confirmed to be senior JI members, while many others were suspected members or sympathizers who clearly supported JI and its paramilitary activities. In the past several years, these sub-branches such as KOMPAK Kayamanya have become distinct Islamist paramilitaries in their own right. While engaging in charitable work to recruit locals, they then move from the provision of aid to the provision of security for Muslim communities. While KOMPAK disavows any ties to JI, its leaders remain deeply sympathetic to its cause. The paramilitaries represent off-shoots and while there is no proof, there are considerable grounds for suspicion that they retain links to KOMPAK.

In May 2006, there were a string of arrests of leaders of Kompak Kayamanya, including the Mindanao veteran Hasanuddin, a leading bomb maker, Taufik Bulaga, and Haris, a top operative. These arrests led to several other members, and by mid-2006 police were confident that they were gaining the upper-hand. On 22 October 2006, however, there was a clash between police – some 700 Brimob troops – and militants in Poso, which caused mob violence.

In November 2006, police announced the arrest of 15 members of KOMPAK Kayamanya. It is thought to have roughly a hundred men, and police are actively searching for 14 known leaders and members. In addition, there is the residual presence of JI's original paramilitaries, Laskar Jundullah, its umbrella group, the Committee to Implement Sharia in South Sulawesi, and the Laskar Mujihidin, which is now overtly involved in humanitarian welfare. These groups are committed to JI's ends of establishing an Islamic state in Indonesia, governed fully by the *Sharia*; a state that is thoroughly antithetical with the rights of religious minorities. They have focused more on JI's original strategy of fomenting sectarian violence.

While many of the militants involved in the attacks are local, most of the leaders, such as Hasanuddin and current leaders, Ustadz Yahya and Mas Toto, come from Java and other regions. Ansyad M'bai, the National Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, has asserted that a leading JI member who was a key participant in the Bali bombing "played an important role" in the October 2003 attacks in Poso that killed 10 people and coincided with the anniversary of the Bali bombing. Likewise, on 2 May 2005, Indonesian police arrested three suspects wanted in conjunction with the August 2003 bombing of the JW Marriott in Jakarta, in a small village outside of Poso, Sulawesi. All three, Suryadi (32), Saifullah (38) and Sucipto (37), as well as a fourth who escaped, were involved in not only the sectarian bloodletting in Ambon in 1999-2000, but also the 24 April attacks in Mamasa.

On in late May 2005, both the Vice President and the Indonesian National Police announced that the group responsible for the 28 May Tentana bombings had clear links to a large JI cell in Solo, Java. Basri, the ringleader of the group that beheaded the three school girls in November 2005 admitted to having been trained by JI instructors, starting in 2003, and to taking an oath of loyalty, after their weekly indoctrination lessons. In March 2006, five militants found fund raising for JI were arrested in Poso. Enceng Kurnia, a leader of KOMPAK was sentenced in late 2006 for supplying weapons to JI paramilitaries, as well as for protecting fugitive leader Noordin Mohammad Top. On 7 May 2006, the elite counter-terrorism force Detachment 88 arrested five men in the central Sulawesi town of Tolitoli close colleagues of Noordin Mohammad Top. The flow is not one way: In February 2007 police were searching for a senior militant trained by Dr. Azahari and Noordin in Blitar, East Java, who was then sent to Poso, and had returned to Java to take over a JI cell. Mukhlas, a JI leader sentenced to death for his role in the 2002 Bali bombing, is still encouraging jihad in Sulawesi through taped sermons. There is a clear connection between the same people engaged in both "international jihad" and sectarian conflict.

### **A Robust Enough Response?**

The security presence in Maluku and Sulawesi has not proven strong enough to stop murders, bombings, and intimidation, and few refugees have returned to their pre-conflict homes. Following provocative attacks, the government tends to dispatch large number of army and Brimob forces to restore order, and then quickly withdraw them when a semblance of order is restored, which invariably leads to more violence. For example, one thousand additional security forces were dispatched to Central Sulawesi following the November 2005 beheadings, but quickly withdrawn. Days after Indonesian authorities announced that they were withdrawing more than two battalions from the Malukus because of the "improved security situation," a bomb ripped through a crowded market in Ambon on 25 August 2006,

injured nine but killed no one. President Bambang Susilo Yudhoyono ordered top police to the region in October 2006 to oversee operations. Soon after, the coordinating Minister for Politics and Security, Admiral Widodo, issued a report in November 2006, which called for a permanent Brimob unit to be based in the region, so that they would have a deterrent role and better human intelligence than an outside group deployed when conflicts erupted.

Despite the arrests of many of its leaders in 2006, KOMPAK Kayamanya has proved to be well entrenched in the community. Security forces are getting better, though. Their intelligence and operational finesse have improved markedly, especially those of the elite counter-terrorism forces Detachment-88. On 11 January 2007, for example, two Detachment-88 rapid reaction units (24 men) raided Tanah Runtuh, capturing four men on their most wanted list.

On 22 January 2007, government forces responded to reports of a large number of armed militants massing near Poso. The raid triggered a gun battle in which 15 suspected fighters and one officer were killed. In all 17 suspected terrorists were killed in January in clashes with the police. Over 50 people were arrested, yet more than 50 suspected militants were able to escape. Following the shootout, the government dispatched an additional 100 police to the province, but had pledged to withdraw them by February: "The situation is improving... and the [current] security system is no longer needed," explained a police spokesman.

Yet, tension in Maluku and Sulawesi remains high, and it would probably take little for a new, large-scale conflict to begin. "The terror motive in Palu is apparent. They want people to feel insecure," said Brig. Gen. Oegroseno, the police chief in Central Sulawesi province. The government's will to intervene has repeatedly been called into question, and it remains to be seen whether politicians will be willing to provoke a backlash from Islamists by appearing to take the side of Christians in the remote provinces. Moreover, there have been plenty of incidents provoked by Christian groups: Riots erupted following the execution of three Christians in September 2006, who were found guilty of inciting violence against Muslims. Some 20 Christians were arrested for murdering two Muslims and attacking a police station during the protests; attacks that have only led to a new cycle of sectarian violence. The region remains a tinderbox that all sides can exploit

Part of the problem is that the government has downplayed the conflict, asserting that it is localised, and that a more robust response would therefore be counter-productive. As the Vice President Jusuf Kalla recently explained: "What we have in Poso is terrorism, not (sectarian) conflict. A conflict is between two communities. What we have there is remnants of the past that have been radicalised to the point of terror." Nevertheless, while these are small groups, they are clearly capable of causing mass fear in communities already traumatized by years of violence. And JI, redoubled in its commitment to establish a secure base of operations, is clearly behind the unrest.