

# Jemaah Islamiya Enters Regrouping Phase

Publication: Terrorism Focus Volume: 3 Issue: 45

November 21, 2006 02:59 PM Age: 3 yrs

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In response to President George W. Bush's November visit to Indonesia, there have been demonstrations by Islamist parties and organizations, as well as increased terrorism threat warnings (Jakarta Post, November 19, 20). Indonesian security officials have braced themselves for an attack for several months now. Jemaah Islamiya (JI) has executed a major terrorist attack every year since 2002; each attack has occurred approximately 10-13 months after the previous one. The last attack was the October 2005 triple bombings in Bali that killed 22. The Bali II attacks did not consist of JI's hallmark large truck bombs, but involved small bag bombs similar to the terrorist operations in Madrid and London. The smaller bombs may represent diminished resources, but they also could be assessed as both a counter-measure and as an attempt to increase the tempo of the attacks. When JI's top bomb-maker, Dr. Azahari bin Husin, was killed in a shootout in November 2005, 33 smaller bombs in various states of construction were recovered in his safe house. In addition to killing the most notorious bomber, authorities were able to seize the bulk of JI's explosive cache. In 2006, there were raids on several other safe houses that netted a few more bombs. On October 3, a woman smuggling nine kilograms of plastic explosives was arrested. The losses of Azahari, the cache and the dragnet for top operatives including Noordin Mohammad Top and Zulkarnaen, have clearly set back JI's operations. If JI is weakened operationally, what is the state of its organization?

Several commentators now speak of irrevocable factional rifts in JI between the pro-al-Qaeda camp that favors collapsing the state by damaging the economy, and the proponents of the neo-Darul Islam schools that argue that JI should focus on sectarian conflict and aim to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia (Reuters, November 11). Evidence of this has been documented on web forums and in chat rooms. This rift, however, is overstated for three reasons. First, Hambali, and others equated as being the leaders of the pro-al-Qaeda line, threw themselves into fomenting sectarian conflict in 1998-2001 and saw such conflicts as essential to their goal. Second, they are not mutually exclusive strategies. Indeed, many of the operatives tied to the JW Marriott and Australian Embassy bombings were arrested as a result of investigations into the ongoing sectarian violence in the Maluku and in Central Sulawesi. Sectarian violence is an important recruiting and indoctrinating tool for JI. Third, too much attention is given to recent statements by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (also known as Abu Bakar Bashir), who is now publicly denouncing jihad.

In a sermon in a mosque in Kediri, an East Java province, Ba'asyir urged his followers to go abroad to wage jihad, although without explaining why. "If you want to go on jihad, do not do it here [Indonesia], but in the southern Philippines or even in Iraq" (Antara News, November 6). He reiterated a statement that he had said in the past: the Bali bombers were legitimate jihadis, but their jihad was "not at the right time or place." He concluded by saying, "Therefore, I ask MMI [Mujahideen Congress of Indonesia] followers not to imitate them because [their actions] are harmful. They miscalculated." Ba'asyir has espoused a program of dawah (preaching Islam) to achieve his goal of establishing an Islamic state. Ba'asyir did not condemn the actions of the Bali bombers on moral or theological grounds, but on timing. Likewise, he is endorsing violent jihad in places other than Indonesia. Second, he has never used his authority to stop the annual bombings. Ba'asyir is trying to keep himself out of prison. This was a large public sermon and little is known about what he may be saying in private. Although he was released in June, Indonesia had been under diplomatic pressure for an earlier release and other remissions of JI members. The strategies are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they are mutually reinforcing as they are not theological or ideological condemnations, but more tactical shifts. The al-Qaeda strategy was counter-productive because it led to mass arrests, including of top leaders, and placed undue international attention and pressure on the Indonesian government to crack down.

What is occurring now is less zero-sum factional rifts than breakdowns in the organization's command and control. JI always encouraged members to establish their own cells as well as organizations with varying degrees of overtones. With the arrest of much of the Mantiqi structure, JI has become a far more horizontal organization with much less command and control. Individual wakaahs and cells are more autonomous than they have ever been. Therefore, what may appear as irrevocable factional rifts could simply be organizational disunity because of counter-terrorist operations.

Within JI, there is a feeling that the annual bombings of soft Western targets, while still being conducted as part of the jihad, have been counter-productive because they have led to harsh crackdowns and arrests of key members. This marks a tactical shift and not a strategic one. What should we expect from JI in the coming years? There will still be terrorist attacks against Western targets and probably more in the Philippines, but they will be smaller and less effective (Sun Star, November 13). JI is in a regrouping phase, and to that end it will focus on recruitment and indoctrination, fomenting sectarian violence and broadening its network of overt civil society and social welfare organizations.

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