

Jemaah Islamiya Still a Potent Force for Violence in Southeast Asia

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While many have written off Jemaah Islamiya (JI), the Southeast Asian terrorist group responsible for two in bombings in Bali in 2002 and 2005 and two in Jakarta in 2003 (the JW Marriott hotel) and 2004 (the Australian Embassy), arrests across Java in the past week have demonstrated the group's resilience. There was a collective sigh of relief in 2006 since it was the first year since 2002 that JI was unable to perpetrate a major terrorist attack. This setback comes at the heels of the death of the group's leading bomb-maker, Malaysian-national Dr. Azahari bin Husin, in November 2005. After killing him in a shootout, Indonesian counter-terrorist forces also recovered 33 bombs in various states of construction from his safe house. It was no wonder that 2006 was free of any major incidents. Nevertheless, JI has proven to be remarkably resilient.

Although the arrest last week of a JI suspect led to a string of successes for counter-terrorist forces, it more importantly revealed JI's determination to continue their campaign of terrorism. On the evening of March 20, police shot and killed one top JI suspect and captured another in Sleman, Yogyakarta. One of the suspects, Aman Suryanto, returned fire with an M-16 assault-rifle until he was shot in the stomach. He died en route to the hospital. In all, six members of JI were captured. One member, Mujadid, is alleged to have been involved in the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing as well as a bombing in a crowded marketplace in Poso, a region wracked by sectarian violence (Jakarta Post, March 24, 2006). Early rumors surfaced that the two suspects neutralized on March 20 were JI's top leaders, including Malaysian-national Noordin Mohammad Top and Ainal Bahri, who is known by his nom de guerre Abu Dujana (Terrorism Focus, July 25, 2006; Terrorism Focus, April 4, 2006). Security officials later denied that the two were arrested, but were confident that the two were part of Abu Dujana's network (Tempo, March 23). Abu Dujana and Noordin Mohammad Top were two of the most senior JI leaders still at large. Both have played important roles in fundraising and recruitment, and Dujana is thought to have taken over as the group's amir, or spiritual leader, while keeping his role as JI's secretary of the central command.

Furthermore, on March 23 a raid on the house of Aman Suryanto netted a major haul of weapons and explosives: three automatic weapons and ammunition, 30 sacks of explosives, 50 kg of TNT, several large jugs of chemicals, 193 detonators and 43 bits of circuitry, similar to those used in the three Bali suicide bag bombs in September 2005. In all, police asserted that there were 20 Bali-style bag bombs ready to go. On March 26, police arrested a 25-year old suspected Islamic militant, Ahmad Sahrul Uman (also known as Khoirul), in Surabaya and recovered 12.5 kg of TNT, more than 14 kg of other chemicals, 20 detonators as well as 101 bomb-making manuals and jihadi tracts from his safe house.

These arrests make it clear that JI has assiduously been trying to rebuild its capabilities and is preparing for more high-profile bombings against Western targets. The organization has already been involved in the recent marked increase of sectarian violence in the troubled outer islands of the Malukus and Sulawesi. Therefore, while 2006 was free from major JI operations, the organization is still a potent force for violence in Southeast Asia.

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