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Local Jihad:
Radical Islam and terrorism in Indonesia

Executive summary

The Bali bombings of October 2002 and the subsequent further uncovering of the extensive terrorist network of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) have produced a more profound questioning of earlier assumptions about the nature of Indonesian Islam. Many see violent radical Islamism in Indonesia as a relatively recent phenomenon, but a closer look at modern Indonesian history shows that this view is mistaken. For more than two hundred years, small sections of the archipelago's Muslim community have been drawn to severely puritanical and militant expressions of the faith, and some highly militant movements have been prepared to use violence to achieve their goals.

Contemporary Indonesian radicalism is a complex mix of local and international factors, as well as religious, political and economic elements. Most radical Muslims believe that Islam has been marginalised and oppressed in Indonesia and that potent domestic and international forces are determined to deny Islam its rightful place at the centre of national life.

External factors have exerted a stronger influence on Indonesian radicalism since the late 1970s. Perhaps the most important development in the context of this paper was the internationalisation of *jihad* that took place from the late 1970s, culminating in the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan during the 1980s. In addition to the *mujahidin* factor, increasing numbers of Southeast Asian Muslims have received their education in the Middle East. They have been exposed to more puritanical and radical expressions of the faith, such as Salafi and Wahabi thinking from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Yemen.

Darul Islam

Darul Islam (DI) is the oldest of Indonesia's radical Islamist movements. It began its armed rebellion in West Java in late 1948. From DI's earliest days, its rhetoric was strongly jihadist and its ideology was absolutist. Most of the DI rebellion was crushed in the early 1960s by the Indonesian Army. The cost of the rebellion was enormous: an estimated 20,000–40,000 people lost their lives, about one million others were evacuated, over half a million properties were destroyed and the economic disruption in DI-affected areas was extensive.

DI's revival began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as former members in West Java began to reactivate the movement covertly. Violent attacks were rare immediately after the organisation's revival, but this began to change in the mid-1980s as growing numbers of DI cadres were attracted to more militant operations. This pattern of jihadist behaviour prompted Sidney Jones to write that, if there's to be any replacement of Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, the chances are that it will have DI roots.

Jemaah Islamiyah

JI is the largest and most sophisticated terrorist network in Southeast Asia and also the region's only genuinely transnational jihadist movement. While Indonesia is the main operational base of JI and provides the bulk of its leadership and membership, the organisation has also had active cells in Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. The 2002 Bali attack marked a major increase in JI's terrorist capacity. Not only was the size and sophistication of the main bomb far greater than anything previously attempted, it was also detonated by a suicide bomber—the first time JI had used this method. Further suicide car-bombings followed, this time in Jakarta, with attacks on the JM Marriott Hotel on 5 August 2003, which killed ten Indonesians and one Dutchman, and on the Australian Embassy on 9 September 2004, which killed eleven Indonesians.

As much as JI sees itself as part of a broader global jihadist movement, it also regards itself as the heir to Darul Islam. DI's armed struggle for an Islamic state in Indonesia and its members' sacrifice in the name of jihad during the 1950s and 1960s make it an inspiration for JI members today. Despite its fragmentation and internecine strife, DI is likely to continue to produce fanatical recruits for JI or other terrorist organisations for many years to come. Using data from several sources, it's possible to conclude that DI's active membership may be several tens of thousands.

JI has been hit hard in the crackdown by the Indonesian police and intelligence services after the Bali bombings. Up to half of the organisation's leaders have been arrested or are fugitives. JI has nonetheless shown considerable resilience and capacity for adaptation to this new, and much less congenial, environment. One of the more interesting developments within JI over the past two years has been a deepening rift between those who favour continued large-scale terrorist attacks and those who want more emphasis on proselytisation, education and recruitment. The seriousness of this dispute remains a matter of debate for JI analysts. It would be wrong, however, to assume that a divided JI would mean a greatly reduced terrorist threat. The more important issue is the strength and extent of the jihadist network, of which JI has been a central player. If JI is fragmenting, this may result in a more diffuse pattern of terrorist activity, rather than one focused on a single organisation.

JI continues to be a significant threat to Australian citizens and assets. The organisation regards Australians as legitimate targets for several reasons. First, Australia is seen as part of the 'West', and thus as an enemy of Islam. This antipathy is heightened by our close alliance with the US. Second, Australia is seen as having orchestrated East Timor's separation from Indonesia as part of its supposed hegemonic designs on Muslim majority nations in the region. Third, Australia's post-Bali collaboration with the Indonesian police in investigating JI attacks and hunting down its members has further raised the ire of JI leaders.

Indonesian responses

Indonesian Government policies on terrorism have changed markedly since the Bali bombings. Before October 2002, successive post-Soeharto governments were either doubtful of the nature of the terrorist threat or reluctant to act against it for fear of a backlash from the Muslim

community. Following the Bali bombings, the Megawati Government's responses improved dramatically. The Indonesian Government has allowed unprecedented cooperation between Indonesian police and intelligence agencies and their foreign counterparts, in particular Australia, and over the past two years has prosecuted and convicted more terrorists than any other national government. Other, more politically sensitive, aspects of the fight against terrorism have been less adequately dealt with.

Foremost among these shortcomings was the failure of both the Megawati and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) governments to explain the nature of the terrorism threat to the Indonesian public, especially as it relates to JI and other terrorist groups. As a result, most Indonesians are ambivalent about the threat. The lack of public understanding of JI as an organisation and a violent subculture within Indonesian Islam militate against broader government counter-terrorism actions, such as measures against schools that teach virulent jihadism. Another shortcoming has been the government's tardiness in proscribing JI. The government has pointed to difficulties in proscribing an organisation with a name as common as Jemaah Islamiyah, and while there's some justification for this view, the problem is not insurmountable. The government's unwillingness to tackle proscription points to the issue's political sensitivity.

SBY, despite his many promises to Western officials to ramp up Indonesia's counter-terrorism efforts, is unlikely to embark on bold new initiatives. One reason for this is the fear that stronger measures against JI and other terrorist groups might open the government to accusations of being anti-Islamic and a tool of the West's 'war on terror'. In short, there's likely to remain a substantial gap between the SBY Government's rhetoric on terrorism and its actions. Nonetheless, if SBY continues to support the ongoing police and intelligence operations against JI, it's reasonable to expect further arrests of would-be terrorists and the foiling of planned operations.

Declining radicalism?

The immediate post-Soeharto years were undoubtedly a time of resurgence for Indonesian radical Islamism. The number of radical groups grew rapidly, accompanied by a dramatic rise in recruitment, fundraising and public profile. Since late 2002, however, the radical revival has stalled and gone into reverse. Radical organisations and media outlets have suffered a succession of setbacks, which they have either struggled or failed to overcome. These groups also had reason to be disappointed with the wider Indonesian response to the US-led Iraq War. As well, local communities in Central Sulawesi and Maluku have largely resisted being drawn into renewed Muslim–Christian violence. This is a source of frustration to militant leaders who believe that religious conflict, particularly perceived anti-Muslim attacks, have a radicalising effect that helps recruitment and fundraising.

Another concern for radical groups has been the shift in community attitudes to them. Many Indonesians are now more inclined to see militant rhetoric as irresponsible and inflammatory. Mainstream Islamic leaders, especially those of more moderate persuasion, have helped to bring about this change by reasserting what they see as the essentially tolerant and pluralist teachings of their faith.

Islamic radicalism has been part of Indonesian political and religious life since independence, and it's likely to remain so. The more important question is to what extent violence becomes a feature of radical behaviour. In the past, political repression, socioeconomic deprivation and cultural alienation, as well as stimuli from elsewhere in the Islamic world, have all contributed to periodic rises in Islamic violence in Indonesia.

With the important exception of JI-related terrorist violence, this cycle appears to be on a downward trend, but a sharp deterioration

in the economy, renewed Muslim–Christian conflict or large-scale shedding of Muslim blood elsewhere in the world could reverse this and create favourable conditions for rising radicalism.

Events since 1998 have demonstrated that Indonesia isn't immune from the broader currents that have shaped Islam throughout its history.

The Australian response

The Australian Government's response to the threat posed to Australia by international terrorism is outlined in two publications: *Protecting Australia Against Terrorism*, released by the Prime Minister in June 2004; and, the White Paper, *Transnational Terrorism: The Threat to Australia*, released by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in July 2004. Together these documents, supported by more than one hundred measures initiated by the government so far, provide the essence of the current national strategy, which is characterised as a 'global campaign against terrorism'.

The strategy concentrates on the provision of domestic security in Australia, but the need for sustained action in the international domain is also addressed, although with less clarity in terms of activities and resources.

Fighting a 'global campaign against terrorism' will require discrete responses to different terrorist threats in different parts of the world; this is not a campaign in which 'one size fits all'. And rather than Australia's counter-terrorism strategy forming part of the overall 'global war on terror' (GWOT) it's the GWOT that forms just one small plank of our overall counter-terrorism strategy. The GWOT has limited application in determining what our response should be to counter extremist Islamic terrorism in Indonesia.

The fight to combat JI and like organisations will not be fought in Australia, or even primarily by Australia. As the threat posed by JI is more a terrorist campaign than an effective insurgency, it follows that greater emphasis should be placed on developing the capabilities of the Indonesian police and intelligence services rather than those of the Indonesian military.

It should also be recognised that a JI that focuses on fomenting sectarian and secessionist conflict within Indonesia may be a greater threat to Australian national interests than a JI that specifically targets Australian nationals.

Australia needs a coherent long-term strategy to combat the threat posed by jihadist terrorism in Indonesia and the wider region. The strategy needs to go beyond the broad objectives outlined in published documents and address in more detail the range of enabling initiatives that will contribute to their achievement.

Recommendations

Strategy

1. Australia should develop a coherent long-term strategy to combat the threat posed by jihadist terrorism in Indonesia and the wider region. The strategy needs to go beyond the broad objectives outlined in the published documents and address the range of enabling initiatives that will contribute to their achievement.
2. The basis and framework of such a strategy should be to:
   - clearly identify and define what it is we are fighting, the tactic of terrorism, or the ideology of radical Islam, or both
   - recognise the nature of the threat we face

- work out appropriate long term and interdisciplinary initiatives to fight it
- develop tangible measures of success, and
- have a clear sense of what achieving victory might mean.

Intelligence

3. Threat assessments need to take into account a more diverse regional terrorist threat but particularly within Indonesia itself. The potential for more local and seemingly less professional militant groups to broaden their experience and objectives needs to be kept under watch.

4. Recognising that gaining a better understanding of the terrorist threat is an area that needs more attention, 'red teaming' should be introduced in terrorism analysis. This would involve setting up teams of analysts to think like terrorists, and could be conducted within existing government agencies or through contracted arrangements.

5. The government should also develop some form of ongoing empirical study of the backgrounds, motivations and recruitment of known JI members. Once developed, this information could be the basis for a regionally shared database on terrorism. This could take the form of a regional capacity-building exercise.

Attitudes and ideas

6. In attempting to wage a 'battle of ideas' we need to be realistic as to what can be achieved. Western countries do not necessarily have an ideological alternative to offer those attracted to the jihadist's view of the world. Even cultivating moderate Muslims may not be enough. Consideration should be also given to engaging some of the more fundamentalist Islamic scholars and organisations who object to the use of terrorism.

7. The government should consider the development of an 'Indonesian Attitudes Project' to provide baseline data and analysis on the Indonesian population's attitudes to terrorism, Australia, and the role of Islam in public policy. Once such a survey of Indonesian opinion has been established, the next priority should be to develop a suitable public diplomacy strategy.

8. The government should consider the development of a well-funded, targeted and extensive research program extended to universities, research institutes and individuals on a wide range of topics to enable a better understanding of radical Islamism and terrorism.

Capacity building

9. Capacity-building within the region should remain a key priority of the government's regional strategy. The government should review and expand the current Defence Cooperation Program with Indonesia. A priority area for development would be an expanded maritime cooperation program, including assistance to provide additional naval craft to patrol Indonesia's maritime approaches and borders.

10. In many countries, the lack of intelligence coordination has been a major obstacle to effective counter-terrorism. As part of its capacity-building activities the Australian Government should encourage the development and improvement of relations between intelligence agencies in Indonesia.

11. Recognising that the wider Indonesian community is the audience our efforts should be directed towards, the Australian Government needs to show a fair degree of public patience towards how the Indonesian Government deals with its terrorist threat.

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Prepared by:
Greg Fealy and Aldo Borgu

Greg Fealy holds a joint appointment as research fellow and lecturer in Indonesian politics at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, and the Faculty of Asian Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra. His main research interests are Islam and post-independence Indonesian politics. He is currently studying Islamic neo-revivalism and terrorism in Indonesia, as well as the impact of globalisation upon religio-political behaviour. Greg gained his PhD from Monash University in 1998 with a study of the history of Indonesia's largest Islamic party, recently published in Indonesian as *Ijtihad Politik Ulama: Sejarah NU, 1952–1967*. He is the co-editor of *Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditionalism and Modernity in Indonesia* and *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralisation and Democratisation*. He was the CV Starr Visiting Professor in Indonesian Politics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington DC, semester one, 2003. Greg has also worked as an Indonesia analyst at the Office of National Assessments and as a consultant to AusAID, The Asia Foundation, USAID, BP and the Lowy Institute.

Aldo Borgu is currently Program Director, Operations and Capability, at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. He is responsible for managing and developing ASPI's policy research program on military operations, defence capability, terrorism and counter-terrorism. Aldo also writes as the military analyst for *The Daily Telegraph* (Australia) newspaper. He is the author of *Understanding Terrorism: 20 Basic facts*, *Beyond Bali: ASPI's Strategic Assessment 2002*, and *Australia's Defence after September 11*, as well numerous articles on defence capability, terrorism and insurgency. Before joining ASPI, Aldo worked as the Senior Adviser to the Minister of Defence, as a policy officer in the International Policy Division of the Department of Defence, and as a strategic analyst in the Defence Intelligence Organisation.

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