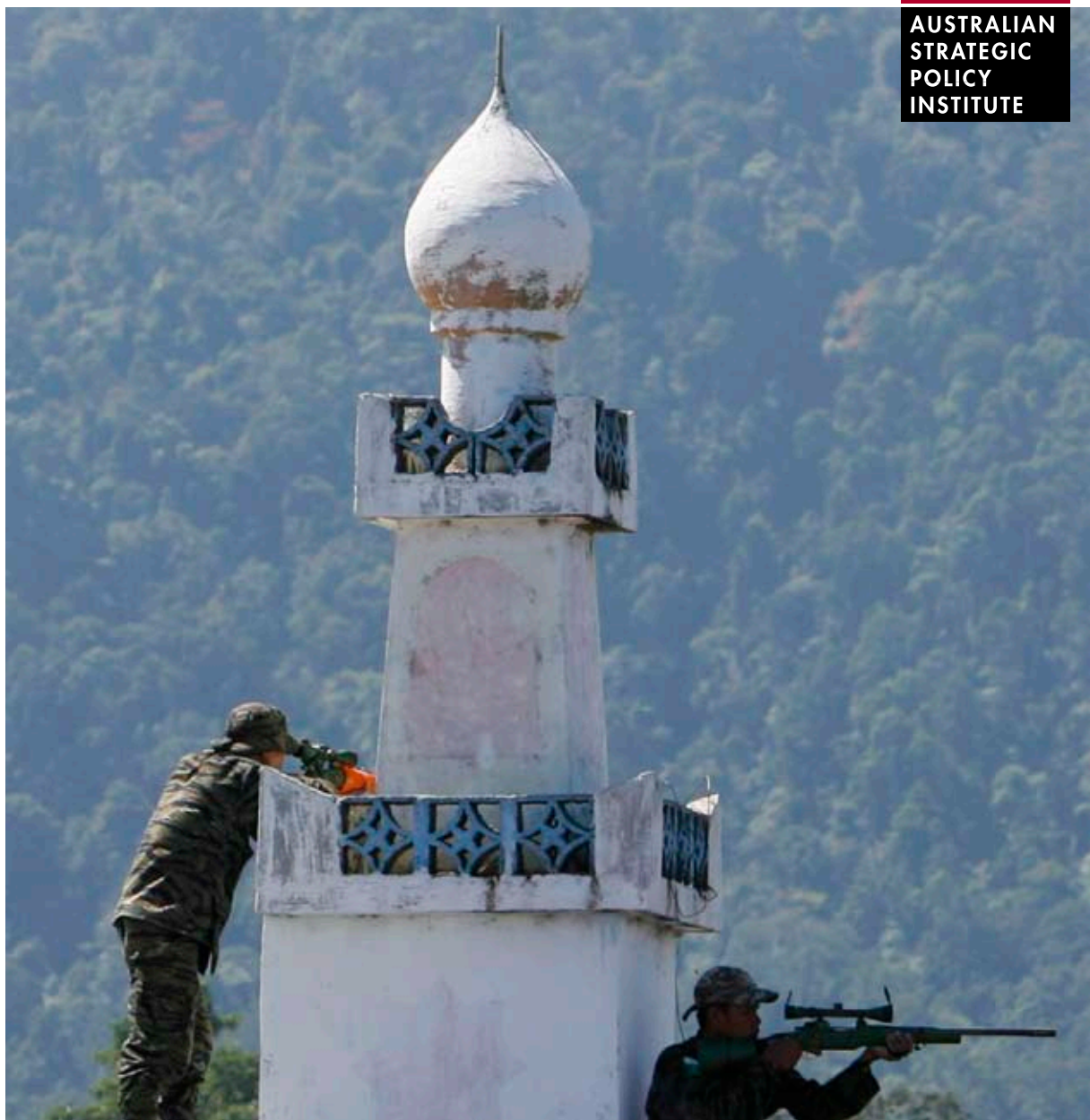


Neighbourhood watch

The evolving terrorist threat in Southeast Asia

A S P I

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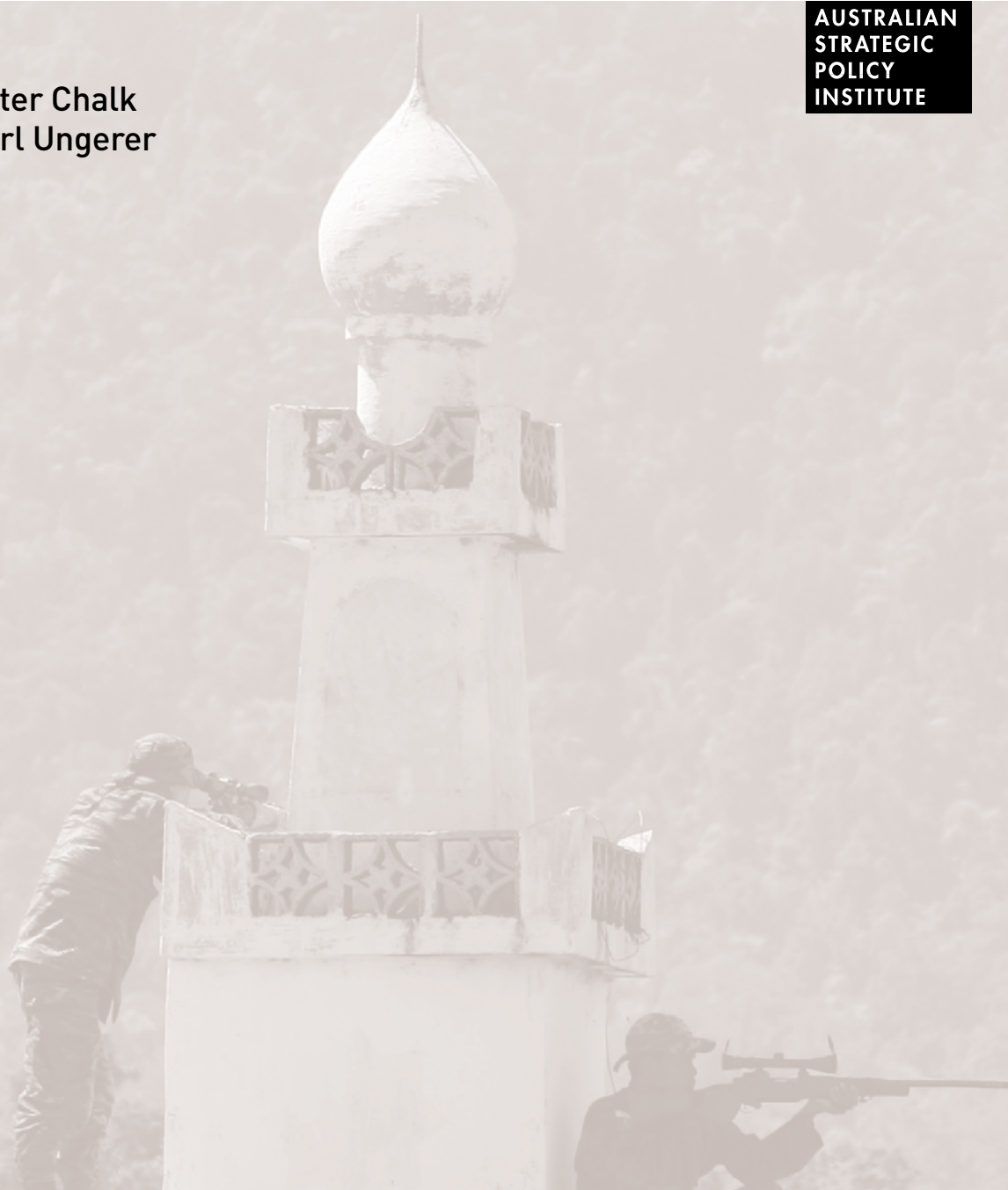
Cover image: Members of the Philippine's largest Islamic rebel group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) take up positions at a mosque inside the guerrilla base during the central committee hearing at the southern island of Mindanao 11 March 2008.

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Carl Ungerer



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Executive Director's introduction

Australia's national security is linked to the security and stability of our neighbours. Although the risk of state-based conflict has diminished in recent years, other challenges and pressures have emerged. This is particularly true of religiously-motivated terrorism in Southeast Asia, which remains an issue of direct relevance to the national security interests of Australia; most importantly, the safety of our citizens. Maintaining a close eye on the evolving dynamic of this threat is, therefore, both prudent and appropriate.

The authors of this report, Peter Chalk and Carl Ungerer, are well placed to make this assessment. Based on their extensive primary research in Southeast Asia, including interviews with senior government officials in each of the countries discussed, the two writers examine the current operational and organisational dynamics of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), as well as the two major zones of regional conflict—southern Thailand and the southern Philippines.

Neighbourhood Watch examines the continuing relevance of the premise that terrorism and insurgencies in Southeast Asia are essentially 'local' in character and not representative of pan-regional influences or designs. In this way, the report presents a valuable contribution to understanding the contemporary nature of regional religious militancy by looking at terrorist groups and their connections across borders, rather than merely thinking of JI as simply 'Indonesian' or the Abu Sayyaf Group as only relevant to the Philippines.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations for Australia's policy makers. It argues that given the cyclical nature of religious extremism in the region, assessments which talk of a diminishing terrorist threat in the future will likely prove premature. Although the organisational structure and capacity of Southeast Asian terrorist networks today is vastly different from the grandiose ideological agendas and strategic designs of the past, new trends are emerging that foreshadow a possible return to regional militancy. In particular, the recent growth of *jihadist* literature and internet propaganda has the potential to radicalise a new generation of recruits.

I thank the two authors for their efforts in producing this timely and insightful report on the evolving nature of regional terrorism. I am also grateful to Anthony Bergin, Janice Johnson and the external reviewers for their contributions to this project.

Peter Abigail

Executive Director

Executive summary

The nature and evolution of the regional terrorist threat remains high on the list of Australia's national security priorities. Since evidence first emerged of the plot against the Australian High Commission and other diplomatic missions in Singapore in 2001, the government's security and intelligence agencies have attempted to gain a better understanding of Islamist militancy throughout the Southeast Asian region.

Between 2002 and 2005, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) emerged as the principal terrorist threat to the region. JI conducted multiple bombing campaigns against Australian and Western targets across the Indonesian archipelago, including most recently a series of suicide bombings on the resort island of Bali which killed or injured more than 150 people.

Since then, JI has suffered major losses as a result of the crackdown by Indonesian authorities and internal rifts that have effectively seen the group divide into two main, competing blocs—a pro-bombing faction and a somewhat more conservative mainstream group often referred to as the 'bureaucrats'. Despite these changes, however, JI continues to represent a significant threat to both Australian and regional security interests, and can still count on a hardcore membership of around 900 militants. Perhaps more importantly, a cadre of at least fifteen first generation JI leaders remain at large, including the Malaysian-born accountant Mohammad Noordin Top and Aris Sumarsono, aka Zulkarnaen, who allegedly acts as al-Qaeda's current 'point-man' in Southeast Asia.

Nearly six years after the first Bali bombings, it is time to take stock of the regional security environment and to ask how the Southeast Asian terrorist threat might evolve in the future.

Neighbourhood Watch analyses the changing nature of religious militancy in Southeast Asia and sets out a framework for understanding the forces and trends that are driving *jihadi* extremism in the region. It provides a comprehensive examination of the organisational and operational capabilities of the major terrorist groups including JI, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao

and the various groups associated with the current manifestation of Malay Muslim separatist violence in southern Thailand. In each case, the nature and extent of pan-regional networks and connections are examined.

The report argues that Australia's response to the current threat environment should focus on consolidating recent gains in bilateral counter-terrorism efforts and look to areas of further cooperation on a regional or multilateral basis. Especially useful in this regard would be reinstituting a high-level political dialogue on terrorism and leading a new diplomatic campaign to improve compliance with international counter-terrorism conventions.

The net assessment that emerges from this analysis highlights the changing terrorist dynamic in Southeast Asia. Although JI has failed in its efforts to combine two of the region's most active Islamic conflicts into a single zone of ideological convergence, the strategic threat from terrorism remains multifaceted and real. In looking to the future, it is the ungoverned spaces that have traditionally suffered from endemic religious conflict that are likely to pose the region's most serious long-term problems. It is essential, therefore, that Australian and Southeast Asian governments remain vigilant in the face of evolving political developments in these areas and work conscientiously to make these ungoverned spaces less hospitable to terrorist exploitation.



INTRODUCTION

Australia has been largely free of domestic and imported terrorism, and still does not confront the same level of threat as other states in North America or Western Europe. That said, the country's overall risk profile as a potential target has been substantially heightened over the past decade, both as a result of Canberra's close security and defence alliance with the US and the support the former government under John Howard gave to George Bush's post-2001 global war against terrorism. As the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has noted previously, Australia or Australian interests were the subject of planned, conducted or aborted terrorist attacks every year from 1999 to 2005.¹ At the same time, globalisation and increased cross-border movements of people, money and commodities have rendered redundant the traditional defence afforded to the country by geographic distance.

Currently, the main terrorist threat to Australia's regional security interests comes from Islamic extremists connected with the Indonesian-based Jemaah Islamiyah network ...

Currently, the main terrorist threat to Australia's regional security interests comes from Islamic extremists connected with the Indonesian-based Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) network, which is now generally acknowledged as the most dangerous terrorist entity in Southeast Asia. The movement and its various offshoots have already been implicated in several attacks that have had a direct impact on

Photo opposite: Top militant Abu Dujana arrives in a court for his trial in Jakarta 21 April 2008. An Indonesian court sentenced Dujana to 15 years in prison. The military commander of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) militant group was arrested in June on charges of keeping explosives and sheltering fugitives wanted for a series of deadly attacks in the country in recent years.
© Crack Palinggi/Reuters/Picture Media

Australia's security interests, including the October 2002 and 2005 suicide bombings on the resort island of Bali (which, together, left 92 Australians dead) and the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in 2004. In the past few years there have been repeated allegations that the domestic agendas of established Southeast Asian Islamist entities have broadened and now give greater precedence to the 'far enemy' (that is, the US, its allies and states endorsing capitalist and/or Western democratic values, as distinct from the 'near enemy'—their respective national governments) and related region-wide imperatives of the sort traditionally advocated by JI.

If Australia is to accurately track and measure Islamist terrorism in Southeast Asia—and the precise threat that it poses to the country's national security interests—it is important that any gaps in understanding are addressed.

Problematically, however, although various ideological and operational ties have been identified, verified and documented, the precise nature of Islamist militancy in Southeast Asia—both in respect of local groups and JI itself—has yet to be mapped in a definitive manner. If Australia is to accurately track and measure Islamist² terrorism in Southeast Asia³—and the precise threat that it poses to the country's national security interests—it is important that any gaps in understanding are addressed. A thorough grasp of the current organisational and operational dynamics of local terrorist groups and the extent to which they are (or are not) gravitating towards pan-regional designs will allow for a more informed and nuanced debate on how best to mitigate the challenge from Muslim extremists based in Southeast Asia.

This will not only contribute to the development of counter-terrorism approaches that are relevant, credible and sustainable; it will also help to ensure that sensitive internal Islamic balances are not upset (and unduly radicalised) by inappropriate policy responses. This *Strategy* paper assesses the current terrorist environment in Southeast Asia. Its purpose is to describe the motivations, aims, modus operandi and effectiveness of regional jihadist groups and the extent to which they interact across national and international borders. By analysing those trends, this paper offers a comprehensive overview of the evolving Islamist terrorist threat to Australian security interests. In chapter 2, the report discusses the broad parameters and evolving dynamic of JI, detailing the movement's history, ideological agenda, organisational structure, cohesiveness and operational methods. In chapters three and four, the report goes on to examine specific threat conditions in two established zones of regional conflict outside Indonesia—the Malay-Muslim provinces of southern Thailand and Mindanao in the southern Philippines—and the extent to which pan-regional designs promoting an Islamic caliphate have gained a hold in these particular areas. The study concludes with some basic policy prescriptions for framing Australia's counter-terrorism policy in Southeast Asia.



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Chapter 2

THE JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH NETWORK

Background

Jl traces its roots to Darul Islam (DI, literally the ‘House of Islam’), a movement driven by theological, ethnic and social imperatives that was established by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwirjo in the late 1940s. The organisation was committed to the creation of an Islamic State of Indonesia (Negara Islam Indonesia) and refused to recognise the legitimacy of the secular-oriented Indonesian state after the transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch in December 1949. In pursuit of its objectives, DI launched a series of rebellions across Java, northern Sumatra and south Sulawesi, during the 1950s and 1960s that posed a direct and serious challenge to the authority of the central government in Jakarta. Although the DI insurgency was effectively broken by 1962, the group’s beliefs were never fully expunged and continued to resonate with some Islamic militants throughout the country. In 1972 two of these radicals, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Bashir, set up Pesantren al-Mu’min—a boarding school based in Solo, central Java, dedicated to the propagation of puritanical teachings. A year later, the school relocated to the village of Ngruki where it became known as Pondok Ngruki. It is here that many of Jl’s original members were first indoctrinated into the hardline interpretations of the Islamic faith.⁴

In 1985 Sungkar and Bashir, together with an inner core of Ngruki alumni, fled to Malaysia to escape the perceived anti-Islamic policies of the Soeharto regime. During this period of exile they acted as a critical ‘way station’ for Indonesians and other Muslims from Southeast Asia who were en-route to Pakistan and Afghanistan to study and/or participate in the ranks of *mujahidin* forces fighting the Soviet Union. This experience had a profound impact on both Sungkar and Bashir, particularly in terms of directing their ideology outwards to the broader

Photo opposite: Indonesian Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Bashir delivers a speech to the Muslim community. © 2006 Adek Berry/AFP/Getty Images

region. This influence became apparent in 1993—the timeframe that most commentators agree marks the formal institution of JI as a terrorist organisation. It was during this period that expression was given to the establishment of a puritanical Islamic state (*Daulah Islamiyah*) in Indonesia as a stepping stone in the development of a wider regional ‘super state’ for all Muslims. This vague and ill-defined goal, dressed up in the language of a *salafist* caliphate, was envisioned to embrace all of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, and the southern areas of the Philippines and Thailand.

The collapse of the Soeharto regime in 1998 proved to be a significant boon to the emerging JI network.

The collapse of the Soeharto regime in 1998 proved to be a significant boon to the emerging JI network. Formerly restricted Islamic groups from across the political spectrum were suddenly allowed to operate more freely, allowing Sungkar and Bashir to return to their country of origin with their Ngruki comrades and openly espouse pan-regional designs. Just as importantly, the inability of the government in Jakarta to retain control over Indonesia’s outer islands led to the eruption of major Christian–Muslim clashes that by the end of the millennium had plunged Maluku (Ambon) and Sulawesi (Poso) into what amounted to a full-scale sectarian civil war. This outbreak of ethno-religious violence provided JI with an ideal operational environment in which to recruit fighters, gain battlefield experience and consolidate in preparation for its own self-defined campaign of jihadist violence.

The US designated JI a foreign terrorist organisation in October 2002, shortly after the first Bali attacks. At the request of both Australia and Indonesia, the group was subsequently added to the United Nations’ list of proscribed entities, a move that requires all member states to freeze its assets, deny it access to funding and prevent its cadres from entering or travelling through their territories.

Ideology and objectives

As noted, JI’s immediate goal is the Islamisation of Indonesia, a vision that dates back to DI and its assertion that the only legitimate basis for the state was one that fully embodied the Muslim faith as its sole foundation. JI took this original conception and enshrined it as a fundamental component of a broader ideological vision that viewed *Daulah Islamiyah* as the necessary catalyst for the restoration of Islamic governance across Southeast Asia.⁵

According to the group’s ostensible manifesto, *Pedoman Umum Perjuangan Al-Jama’ah Al-Islamiyya* (PUPJI or General Guide for the Struggle of JI, which was first documented in the 1990s) such an outcome can only be achieved in a two-step process. The first is to cultivate a puritanical organisation whose members have a strong sense of religious, social, political and, most importantly military identity; the second is to use the group as a platform from which to launch armed jihad (*jihad musallah*) that is directed against ‘infidels, polytheists, apostates, atheists and the [morally] corrupt’ and aimed at the ultimate creation of a theocratically pure pan-regional Islamic caliphate.⁶

To expedite this process, PUPJI affirms the need to establish a solid base (*qoi'dah sholabah*) of followers who are steadfast in their obedience and totally committed to the movement's long-term objectives. It is these individuals—who must possess personal strengths of faith (*quwwatul aqidah*), brotherhood (*quwwatul ukuwwah*) and fortitude (*quwwatul musallaha*)—that are intended to act as the 'core executor, propagator and guardian of the *jama'ah's* mission.'⁷

The effort to cultivate a solid base can only be understood in the context of JI's unwavering intent to fulfil its long-term objectives through the force of arms. An enduring theme highlighted throughout PUPJI is the idea of JI acting as a distinctly 'military outfit'. The emphasis of the movement as a secret organisation (*tandzim sirri*), the frequent use of the terms intelligence and recruitment (*tajnid*) and the detailed exposition of how to execute armed operations are prominent throughout the manifesto. Those elements, together with an increasing orientation towards martyrdom—which is vindicated both as a highly effective force equaliser and as the most visible means of establishing a true pioneering vanguard to champion the Islamic faith—are strong indicators that JI's conception of jihad is one that is explicitly aimed at combat (*qital*), as opposed to diplomacy or dialogue. By default this negates the perceived validity and utility of other methods of political and social engagement such as negotiations and preaching (*dakwah*).

The lucidity of JI's ideological and operational vision has suffered in recent years, primarily as a result of growing disunity among the movement's ranks in reaction to attacks that have caused significant Muslim casualties. In particular, an increasingly serious disjuncture has emerged between two main factions: a 'pro-bombing' group that advocates 'fast-tracking' the goal of a pan-regional Islamism by engaging in a sustained campaign of suicide bombings across Southeast Asia—even if these are likely to result in civilian Muslim deaths and injuries—and a somewhat more traditionalist bloc (known as the 'bureaucrats') that asserts indiscriminate attacks are not sanctioned by PUPJI and that JI's end-state can only be brought about by Islamising the whole of Indonesia in order to 'positively' tilt the religious balance of the wider region.

... the general thrust of JI's ideological approach can still be summed up as one that aims to Islamise Indonesia in the expectation that this will ultimately foster the requisite conditions for creating a wider caliphate.

Despite this rift, the general thrust of JI's ideological approach can still be summed up as one that aims to Islamise Indonesia in the expectation that this will ultimately foster the requisite conditions for creating a wider caliphate. The adoption of force is commonly viewed as an integral, if not exclusive means of successfully achieving this outcome. Although differences of opinion exist over how quickly JI's end state can be achieved, and the specific targets to be attacked, the long-term goal of instituting a cross-border caliphate as well as the emphasis on developing the resources and capabilities of JI cadres to engage in concerted armed violence, is largely shared by the movement's wider membership.

Organisation and numbers

Jl has been described as al-Qaeda's operational wing in Southeast Asia.⁸ However, this overstates the formality of the relationship between the two organisations. Although links were forged between the two groups early on, based largely on a common (although not identical) worldview, overlapping membership, access to shared training camps in Afghanistan and Mindanao and a willingness to engage in mutually beneficial collaborative ventures, Jl has developed as a distinct entity in its own right. While it has certainly been prepared to accept al-Qaeda funding and technical expertise in the past, the group's organisational structure is one that has been specifically designed to further its own regional Islamist agenda.

Initially, Jl adopted a vertically integrated network composed of several layers. At the helm of the structure was Sungkar, who acted as the preeminent emir or leader of the movement. After Sungkar died in 1999, Bashir assumed exclusive responsibility for Jl's spiritual and ideological development, remaining in this position until he was arrested on charges of treason in October 2002.⁹ It is believed that the post of Jl's emir subsequently passed on, first to Abu Rusdan and then, after his arrest in April 2003, to Ustadz Adung who was arrested in 2004 and then Yusron Mahmudi Zarkas (aka Zarkasih), who was himself arrested in June 2007.¹⁰

Beneath the emir was a regional advisory council (*majelis qiyadah*) headed by a central command (*qiyadah markaziyah*) and chaired, until his arrest in 2003, by Riduan Isamuddin (aka Hambali)—a veteran of the anti-Soviet *mujahidin* campaign in Afghanistan and an important linkman with al-Qaeda. Next came three mid-level councils that oversaw religious and disciplinary matters. The main base of the group was made up of four regional divisions, or *mantiqis*, that were subdivided into smaller operational companies (*khatibah*), platoons (*qirdas*) and squads (*fiah*), and defined along geographic and functional lines. These territorial cells covered the following areas and functions:

Mantiqi I—Singapore, Malaysia (except Sabah) and southern Thailand: mainly responsible for ensuring Jl's economic development

Mantiqi II—Indonesia (except Sulawesi and Kalimantan): responsible for leadership and recruitment

Mantiqi III—Sabah, Sulawesi, Kalimantan and the southern Philippines: responsible for training and weapons procurement

Mantiqi IV—Australia and Papua New Guinea: responsible for fund-raising.¹¹

In practice, however, it appears that Jl worked in a much less centralised fashion than this structure might otherwise imply. As a recent report by the US Congressional Research Service observed:

[The organisation's] goal of developing indigenous jihadis [necessarily] meant that Jl members often had to work with and/or create local groups outside its control. [As a result], it is often difficult to sort out the overlap among Jl and other radical [entities]. Additionally, regional leaders appear to have had a fair amount of autonomy, and ... many of the cells were compartmentalized from one another [for security purposes].¹²

At its height in 1999–2000, Jl was thought to have been able to count on a total membership of around 2,000 activists plus a wider support pool of some 5,000 passive sympathisers who had graduated from the various *pesantrens* under the group's auspices.¹³ However,

thanks to a concerted crackdown on JI by regional police and intelligence forces over the past seven years, possibly as many as 300 cadres have been captured or killed. Crucially these ‘neutralisations’ have extended to some of the movement’s most prominent and adept operational leaders and field commanders, including:

- Hambali—al-Qaeda’s main ‘point-man’ between South and Southeast Asia
- Mohammed Iqbal bin Abdurrahman (aka Abu Jibril)—believed to have been the head of JI’s Malaysia cell and one of al-Qaeda’s main trainers in Southeast Asia
- Fathur Rahman al-Ghozi—one of JI’s leading demolition experts and head of training in Mindanao
- Muklis Yunus—a key linkman between JI and Islamist entities in the southern Philippines
- Mas Selamat Kastari—the former head of JI’s Singapore cell¹⁴
- Azari Husin—a former engineer and one of JI’s top explosives experts who was particularly proficient in the construction of large-scale chlorate and nitrate bombs
- Zarkasih (aka Nuaim, aka Abu Irsyad)—JI’s spiritual emir (following the arrest of Rusdan in 2003), recently convicted on terrorism-related charges
- Abu Dujana—the former personal secretary of Bashir, recently convicted on charges of possessing illegal firearms and explosives.

Those losses have had a marked impact on JI’s institutional make-up, with the movement now far ‘flatter’ and more segmented. Mantiqi I (MI) and Mantiqi IV (MIV) have both been fully dismantled. Mantiqi III (MIII) appears to have been folded into Mantiqi II (MII) and reconfigured around a new leadership body, the *Markaz*, which oversees four sections: religious training, tarbiyah education, logistics and *Sariyah* (or military operations, further subdivided in Java into region-specific locales known as *Ishobas*). In addition, there now appear to be three distinct geographical commands for Indonesia—the West Area, the East Area and Poso.¹⁵

That said, JI can still count on a hardcore membership of around 900 militants and it is thought a cadre of at least fifteen first-generation leaders remain at large.¹⁶ Those first-generation leaders are thought to be at the forefront of the group’s pro-bombing faction and its attacks on Western and (perceived) secularly-oriented enemies in Southeast Asia.¹⁷ Six of those individuals have attracted particular attention among local and international law enforcement agencies:

- Mohammad Noordin Top, a former accountant who allegedly acted as JI’s top recruiter and financier and who, in April 2005, claimed to be overseeing the operations of a hitherto unknown terror entity on the Malay Archipelago, the *Tandzim Qoedatul Jihad Untuk Gugusan Kepulauan Melayu* (al-Qaeda for the Malay Archipelago)¹⁸
- Joko Pitono (aka Dulmatin), an alleged protégé of Husin and experienced electronics engineer
- Umar Patek, who is highly proficient in the manufacture of chemically-based explosives and who is wanted for his role in the 2005 Bali bombings
- Hari Kuncoro, Dulmatin’s brother-in-law
- Zulkifi bin Hir (aka Marwan), who is presently thought to oversee all aspects pertaining to military ordinance for regional terrorist attacks
- Aris Sumarsono (aka Zulkarnaen and also known as Daud), who allegedly acts as al-Qaeda’s current point-man in Southeast Asia and who is thought to be commander of an ‘elite’ JI squad that helped carry out the 2002 Bali attack and the 2003 JW Marriott bombing.

Top and Zulkarnaen are believed to be hiding in Indonesia, while Dulmatin, Patek, Kuncoro and Zulkifi are thought to be in the southern Philippines in areas under the control of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

Operational activities and prospects

Jl exists as an unambiguously jihadist movement that is constructed along paramilitary lines. It asserts the necessity (and religious legitimacy) of engaging in pre-emptive violence whenever tactically and strategically opportune. The group has, as a result, emphasised an active operational agenda that has involved terrorist attacks (planned and perpetrated) both within and beyond Indonesia. Early activities attributed to the movement have included:

- active participation in anti-Christian attacks in Maluku and Sulawesi (1999–2003)
- the attempted assassination of the Philippine Ambassador to Jakarta (August 2000)¹⁹
- the coordinated bombings of thirty-eight churches across Indonesia (December 2000), in which nineteen people died²⁰
- a plot to carry out suicide strikes against military, political, infrastructure and commercial targets in Singapore, including the Australian and British high commissions and the US Embassy (December 2001)²¹
- the bombing of a fast-food outlet in Zamboanga City, Mindanao (October 2002), in which three people died.

Jl’s most audacious and lethal strikes, however, date from October 2002 (see Table 1). These operations, all of which demonstrated considerable bomb making²², planning and surveillance skills, were mostly justified under the twin rubrics of fighting the ‘far enemy’ and fostering the supremacy of Islam across Southeast Asia. Although unquestionably spectacular, Jl’s post-2002 activities generated considerable controversy within the movement: not only did the bombings galvanise concerted counter-terrorist action that led to the arrest of some 300 of the group’s cadres, many people in the movement were uncomfortable with the large number of Muslim casualties that resulted (something that was particularly true of the Marriott and Australian Embassy attacks in Jakarta). Strategically, the operations were also considered by some members to be counter-productive, not least because they directly contributed to increased pressure on Jakarta to crack down on Jl’s main territorial base in Indonesia.

Table 1: High-profile Jl attacks, 2002–2005		
Attack	Deaths	Injuries
Bali bombings, 12 October 2002	202	209
Bombing of JW Marriott Hotel, Jakarta, 5 August 2003	12	150
Bombing of Australian Embassy, Jakarta, 9 September 2004	11	Over 200
Bombing of Philippine <i>SuperFerry 14</i> , 27 February 2004*	116	320
Bali ‘2’ bombings, 1 October 2005	25	129

* The bombing was carried out as a joint operation with the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)—see Table 3.

The net effect of these internal developments has been the splintering of the organisation into traditionalist and pro-bombing factions. Although this has no doubt impacted on Jl’s overall operational capacity, a diminution of its activities in the short-to-medium term is not expected. Indeed, recent research points to the continued traction of Jl’s ideological message

in several other groups in Indonesia, all of which stem from a common DI heritage and all of which have the motivation and intention to conduct further terrorist activities. These groups include Wadah Islamiyah, Laskar Jundallah, Ring Banten and Mujahidin Kompak.

Jl continues to espouse an Islamist agenda, which if not comprehensive, has a type of simplistic quality that continues to resonate in certain quarters of the general population. The splintering of Jl means that there is neither a clearly defined centre of gravity for the authorities to attack, nor the existence of a concerted organisational ‘brake’ to curtail individual terrorist action. This latter factor will feed into a movement that, while amorphous and disaggregated, will be far more difficult to track and predict.

The traditionalists

In looking to Jl’s future operations and prospects, the traditionalists can be expected to focus on rebuilding and consolidating their position inside Indonesia. They are likely to focus on the defence of Muslim interests in the outer islands and the preparation of disciplined *mujahidin* to wage the future Islamic battle first in Indonesia and then more broadly in Southeast Asia.²³

In addition to Bashir’s continued preaching and lectures to student groups across Indonesia, this consolidation phase is being supported by a new wave of jihadi publications, including magazines such as *Jihadmagz* (which is aimed at a relatively wealthy middle-class readership, covers conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Chechnya and espouses anti-Western propaganda) and sophisticated websites that are aimed at both the Jakarta youth market and middle-class audiences. The central message of such publications appears to be the promotion of an Islamic caliphate under strict *shari’a* law. As a recent International Crisis Group (ICG) report has acknowledged, Jl’s current focus on the dissemination of information through a publication network is a direct effort to improve outreach and recruitment as a way of rebuilding the organisation.²⁴ It also provides an important source of terrorist financing through advertising revenue and the sale of video and other materials.

The radicals

The smaller more radical ‘pro-bombing’ faction, by contrast, will find it increasingly difficult to operate in any concerted manner—both as a result of unrelenting counter-terrorist action and popular rejection of indiscriminate tactics that are viewed as having a negative impact on wider Muslim interests.

However, these extremist elements will continue to be able to stage ad hoc, random bombings, especially while figures such as Dulmatin, Top, Patek, Mas Selamat and Zulkifi continue to remain at large. Attacks will probably be cheap, easy to manage and able to be executed by small cells (or even individuals) that can be pulled together at very short notice. In particular, the use of individuals previously unknown to the intelligence and security services may become a more common tactic. These types of strikes will provide the pro-bombers with a useful force multiplier that compensates for their growing weaknesses by highlighting a threat potential that, at least in the perceptions of others, exists in all places at all times.



Chapter 3

MUSLIM RADICALISM IN MINDANAO

Militant context

Militant Islamist threats in the Philippines primarily centre on separatist and jihadist groups based on the southern island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Three principal organisations presently remain at the forefront of national, regional and international concern in this part of the country: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF); the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG); and a dissident faction of the officially-recognised Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which made peace with Manila in 1996,²⁵ generally referred to by security forces in the Philippines as the Misuari Breakaway Group (MBG).

In addition to these organisations, the Rajah Soliaman Islamic Movement (RSIM) has also been linked to periodic terrorist incidents, both in Manila and Mindanao. RSIM, which consists of Christian converts (or reverts as they prefer to call themselves) to Islam, allegedly acts as a militant arm of the far larger (and legal) Balik Islam movement. RSIM's reputed aim is to establish a theocratic Muslim state across the entire Philippine archipelago to rectify what it regards as the artificial influx of Catholic/Christian influences brought in first by the Spanish and then consolidated by the US occupation.

Security analysts believe that between 2002 and 2005 the RSIM group provided logistical support to the ASG, aligning with several of the latter's operations and plans. However, over the past two years, the RSIM has been largely destroyed, suffering from the loss of its leader, Ahmed Santos (who was arrested in November 2005), and a lack of funds. Moreover, some commentators suggest that Islamic converts are not widely respected among the Filipino Muslim population as they are generally considered to have an overly relaxed attitude to religious commitments. According to officials in Manila, the organisation

Photo opposite: Armed members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front ride on the roof of trucks in Marawi City, on route to a central committee conference in Camp Bushra, Lano Del Sur province on the southern island of Mindanao, 7 March 2008. © Darren Whiteside/Reuters/Picture Media

currently has between seventeen and twenty-five members and is no longer considered a threat to national security interests.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front

The MILF was founded in 1984, emerging from an earlier six-year rift with the MNLF, which, prior to making peace with Manila in 1996, traditionally served as the main vehicle for the insurgency in Mindanao. The organisation’s avowed objective for most of its operational life has been the creation of an independent Islamic state—to be governed by *shari’a* law—in all areas where Muslims have traditionally existed as a majority in the southern Philippines. Most of the southern Philippines is now Christian dominated, reflecting vigorous migration, which has been both spontaneous and actively sponsored by Manila, from the northern Luzon provinces. It is estimated that by 1983, as much as 80% of Mindanao’s population was non-Islamic. For this reason, the MILF made its demands in the context of areas where Moro Muslims were traditionally (as opposed to currently) in the majority. Under the hardline leadership of Hashim Salamat, this remained both a central and non-negotiable goal of the MILF:

Autonomy will not work...It will only be manipulated and controlled by the Manila government...Only the full independence of the Bangsamoro people with an Islamic state will solve the problems of Mindanao.²⁶



The MILF is, by far, the strongest group currently operating in Mindanao. While approximations of MILF strength vary widely—largely because many cadres are ‘part-timers’—most commentators believe its armed wing, the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), is able to call on a committed core of between 9,000 and 11,000 members. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) approximation in 2007 was 11,769 fighters with an armoury of some 7,747 weapons that included Garand, M16 and M14 rifles, M230s, landmines, locally-manufactured M79 rocket propelled grenades and .50-calibre and .60-calibre machine guns.

Combatants are organised into fourteen base commands, each of which falls under the overall authority of the BIAF Chief of Staff. The bulk of these fronts are located in central and eastern Mindanao, although the group also has an established territorial presence in Basilan, Sulu and Zamboanga (see Table 2).

Although the MILF constitutes the most developed and well-organised Islamic rebel entity in Mindanao, the group is probably weaker today than at any time in the past because of territorial defeats it suffered at the hands of the AFP.

Although the MILF constitutes the most developed and well-organised Islamic rebel entity in Mindanao, the group is probably weaker today than at any time in the past because of territorial defeats it suffered at the hands of the AFP. Those defeats have included the capture of its main base at Camp Abu Bakar as-Siddique in 2000 and, three years later, the

Table 2: MILF base commands		
Base command	Location	Estimated number of cadres
102	Lanao del Sur	1,547
103	Maguindanao	1,536
101	Maguindanao	1,138
113	Zamboanga del Norte	1,121
105	Cotabato	586
114	Basilan	254
106	Sultan Kudarat	211
104	Sarangani	359
107	South Cotabato	1,028
108	Cotabato	514
112	Davao del Sur	260
109	Bukidnon	379
110	Bukidnon	357
111	Agusan del Sur	306
Total		9,596

Note: These numbers do not include the roughly 480 cadres who make up the National Guard Division (which represents the hardcore of loyalists to Chairman Salamat) or part-time MILF fighters—hence the discrepancy between the table’s total (9,596) and the AFP’s 2007 estimation (11,679).

Source: AFP J2 briefing, Camp Aguinaldo, Manila, January 2008.

loss of the Buliok Complex, which had been set up as an alternative headquarters. Possibly because of its weakened state, the MILF has been prepared to engage in tentative peace talks with the Philippine Government which, for its part, appears to have accepted that the group's insurgency does not lend itself to a purely military solution.

This dialogue has progressed rapidly over the past couple of years, facilitated in large part by the 2003 death of Salamat and by his replacement with the more politically astute and pragmatic Al Haj Murad. Significantly, the new leader has expressed a willingness to revisit the issue of secession, hinting that he may be willing to drop the demand for outright independence if a genuine level of autonomy is granted to Mindanao. To this end, Murad committed to a Mutual Cessation of Hostilities Agreement with the Philippine Government in 2003²⁷, vowing to crack down on renegade commanders who violate the truce or contravene its terms. He has since actively participated in Malaysian-sponsored talks aimed at resolving concerns, ranging from those associated with socio-economic development to ancestral domain.²⁸

At the time of writing most of those issues had been worked out, with the two sides agreeing, in November 2007, on a number of points that would form the basis of a so-called Bangsamoro Judicial Entity (BJE): a final autonomous region for Moro Muslims created and operating within the constitutional ambit of the Philippine state. Presently, two main issues have still to be settled—the size of the BJE and the future of the BIAF. The MILF has stated its interest in reinstituting its armed cadre as the basis of an internal security force for the BJE, whereas the Philippine Government will almost certainly insist on its demobilisation and integration into the AFP. Although the MILF and Manila have yet to resolve those issues, it is hoped that an agreement will be reached before the end of 2008.

Although welcome, Murad's willingness to deal with the Arroyo administration on a diplomatic level has served to somewhat complicate the internal dynamics of the MILF. Although the group's leadership and mainstream membership seem sincere in their desire for peace, several mid-level field officers have denounced the present negotiations as a capitulation to the dictates of Manila and as tantamount to the wholesale betrayal of the Moro Islamic cause. These potential 'spoilers', who are predominantly associated with the 102, 103 and 105 base commands, have vowed to continue the armed struggle for independence irrespective of any accord agreed to by the MILF central committee. The residual threat emanating from these renegade elements is considered to be real, not least because they enjoy a substantial degree of operational autonomy on a day-to-day basis. This latitude reflects the absence of a single, solid chain of command within the MILF, and is indicative of an authority structure that frequently derives from family ties, blood relations and tribal affiliations. More specifically, while base commanders may outwardly show deference to Murad at central meetings of the group's executive committee, many are perfectly free to do 'their own thing' when they return home.

The Abu Sayyaf Group

The ASG, literally 'Bearer of the Sword', was founded on Basilan Island in 1991 under the leadership of Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalini. Originally known as the al-Harakatul al-Islamiyah, the group's goals are the eradication of all Christian influence in the southern Philippines and the creation of an Islamic state of Mindanao whose 'nature, meaning, emblem and objective are basic to peace.' These objectives were first set forth in an undated ASG proclamation—the '*Surah I-Al Fatiha*'—that professed to refute the false lies and insults hurled at the Islamic

religion by Christians and that espoused the liberation of Mindanao from the clutches of oppression, tyranny and injustice as experienced under the Catholic-dominated Philippines Government and military. Despite these pronouncements the ASG has never articulated a clear strategic plan for how they would actually establish a pure Islamic state in the southern Philippines or, indeed, prepare local Muslims for self-rule.

In line with its defining philosophy, most of the ASG's activities during the 1990s took the form of terrorist attacks—mainly shootings and bombings—against churches, missionaries, Christian communities and the security forces (police and military).

In line with its defining philosophy, most of the ASG's activities during the 1990s took the form of terrorist attacks—mainly shootings and bombings—against churches, missionaries, Christian communities and the security forces (police and military). Some of these strikes were especially brutal. One noteworthy incident involved a mass raid on the Catholic town of Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur, that left fifty-three civilians dead.

Although Janjalini originally created the ASG as a movement with the imperative of establishing an Islamic state, he quickly tied this local objective to the regional and global supremacy of Islam through armed struggle. To that end, the ASG paralleled its anti-Christian agenda in Mindanao with an effort to establish logistical and operational links with external terror groups.

Concrete evidence of the ASG's transnational ambitions emerged in 1995 when five of its cells were directly implicated in a plot—known as *Operation Bojinka*—to: (1) target Washington's embassies in Manila and Bangkok; (2) assassinate the Pope and President Clinton during separate visits to the Philippines between 1995 and 1996; and (3) destroy US commercial airliners flying trans-Pacific routes from American west coast cities. The plan was hatched by Ramzi Yousef—the convicted mastermind of the 1993 attack against the World Trade Center in New York—and was only foiled when volatile explosive compounds started a fire in the apartment that he was renting in Manila.²⁹

The fervour of the ASG's Islamist agenda—both domestic and international—began to atrophy in the wake of the discovery of *Bojinka*, a process that rapidly gathered pace three years later when Janjalini was killed in a shoot-out with Philippine police on Basilan Island. At the time this event proved to be a defining moment in the ASG's evolutionary history, triggering a leadership crisis that was rapidly followed by the loss of ideological direction and factionalism that effectively saw the group degenerate into a loosely configured, but highly ruthless, kidnap for ransom (KFR) syndicate. Several subsequent hostage-takings proved to be highly profitable. Abductions of Western tourists in the first half of 2000, for instance, are believed to have netted the ASG an estimated \$20 million in ransom payments.³⁰

Further vitiating the ASG's overall operational purpose and direction have been sustained military assaults on its traditional island strongholds in the Sulu archipelago. Conducted with US training and support³¹, these operations are thought to have reduced the organisation's

current total membership to no more than 100 hard-core militants (plus a wider pool of around 280 active followers). The bulk of these fighters, who remain dispersed in Basilan, Jolo and Tawi-Tawi, are estimated by AFP officials to have access to a limited arsenal of no more than 298 firearms.

It appears that in recent years concerted attempts have been made to re-energise the ASG as a credible and integrated Islamic militant force.

It appears that in recent years concerted attempts have been made to re-energise the ASG as a credible and integrated Islamic militant force. According to Philippine intelligence sources, much of this effort was directed under the combined auspices of Khaddafy Janjalini (the younger brother of Abdurajak) and Jainal Antel Sali (aka Abu Soliaman, a self-proclaimed ASG spokesman), both of whom sought to return the ASG to its militant jihadist origins in the wake of the arrest and killing of several leading bandit commanders post-2004.³² They included Ghalib Andang (aka Commander Robot) and Aldam Tilao (aka Abu Sabya), two domineering personalities who orchestrated many of the earlier KFR operations claimed under the group's name.³³

Although Khaddafy and Soliaman are dead their influence has been significant in reorienting the tactical and strategic direction of the ASG.³⁴ The group, while disaggregated, now routinely refers to itself by its original nomenclature—al-Harakatul al Islamiyah—a re-designation Southeast Asian security commentators believe is indicative of a renewed operational focus on jihadist violence.

In addition, the ASG has steadily scaled back its lucrative KFR activities in favour of a more explicit interest in hitting civilian-centric and, Western targets across the country. Table 3 sets out some of the notable attacks and plots attributed to the organisation over the past four years:

Table 3: High-profile attacks and plots attributed to ASG, 2004–2007	
Date	Incident
February 2004	Firebombing of Philippine <i>SuperFerry 14</i> ^a
February 2005	Coordinated attacks in Davao City, General Santos City and Manila (known as the ‘Valentine Day’ bombings)
March 2005	Planned strikes on restaurants and nightclubs popular with foreigners in Manila’s central business district
March 2006	Bombing of a crowded supermarket in Jolo
January 2007	Planned simultaneous attacks on the sites hosting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and East Asian regional summits
November 2007	Assassination of Congressional Representative Wahab Akbar ^b

a This attack left 116 people dead and remains the most destructive act of maritime terrorism to date.

b Although the ASG never claimed responsibility for Akbar’s killing and the exact motivation(s) behind the attack remain somewhat cloudy, police intelligence officials believe that the operation was executed by Abu Sayyaf militants. *Interviews with police intelligence officials, Manila (January 2008).*

The biggest weakness presently afflicting the ASG is the absence of a nominated commander who is able to command broad support across the organisation. Radullan Sahiron (aka Commander Putol) is the closest that the organisation has to such an individual. However, he is old (in his seventies) and suffers from acute diabetes. The two other potential emirs, Isnilon Hapilon (aka Salahuddin) and Yasser Igasan, suffer from different but just as significant drawbacks. Hapilon is from the Yakan tribe, which is not acceptable to the Tausugs, while Igasan (a 36-year-old who combines skills in financial management with some leadership experience) lacks military experience and, consequently, is not widely viewed as possessing the necessary *mujahidin* qualities required for leadership.

So long as this current leadership void exists, the ASG will continue to operate from the back foot—its renewed jihadist ardour notwithstanding. The greatest danger would be the emergence of a charismatic figure who has both religious and military credentials and who is able to unite the organisation around a dedicated ideological agenda of Islamist militancy. Should such a development occur, it could well alter the overall ASG threat calculus, particularly given the existence of nascent logistical networks that the Philippine National Police (PNP) believe have already allowed the group to extend its operational ‘footprint’ beyond a purely local setting.

The Misuari Breakaway Group

The MBG emerged in 2002 following the arrest of Nur Misuari on charges that he incited a November 2001 rebellion in Jolo and Zamboanga City to forestall the election of a Manila-backed rival to oust him as governor of the MNLF autonomous area (ARMM) set up as part of the 1996 peace accord (see endnote 25).³⁵ The group is mainly composed of MNLF dissidents who demand full implementation of the 1996 peace agreement made with the Philippine Government, the terms of which they claim have been systematically diluted by legislation since passed by the national Congress, and Misuari’s release from prison and his return to a leadership position.

The MBG is currently thought to exist as a tripartite arrangement that links three main factions led by Commanders Sasiyal, Ajibon and Malik. The AFP estimates that the total number of armed pro-Misuari partisans is probably around 660, down from the 3,200 members at the time of the Zamboanga rebellion. Most of these cadres are thought to be under the control of Commander Malik, who is based in Sulu. No publicly available data exists on how many weapons the MBG has access to, although clashes with the military suggest that the group is able to call on a reasonably well-stocked armoury; AFP officials in Manila believe most of these munitions are sourced from MNLF munitions caches that were never properly decommissioned following the signing of the 1996 peace agreement.

There are growing reports that the MBG has moved to forge logistical and operational links with the ASG, the impetus for which is primarily believed to lie with the Malik faction in Sulu. According to AFP sources, much of this support takes the form of ‘right of passage,’ which has allowed Abu Sayyaf militants to move relatively freely between Central Mindanao and Jolo. Military officials further assert that the Malik sub-group has been prepared to actively help the ASG repel security offensives and sweeps in Sulu. Backing of this sort is generally believed to reflect common blood, clan and tribal ties that transcend the two organisations as well as mutual recognition of so-called *pintakasi* obligations. These latter principles dictate reciprocal responsibilities of communal assistance whenever a group is engaged by the military.

Despite cross-organisational bonds, most Moro observers (including representatives of the 'official' MNLF) play down the prospect of a full merger taking place between the MBG and ASG. These commentators largely agree that cooperation between the two groups is strictly tactical in nature, reflecting their fundamentally different motivating agendas: in the former case, the imperative is essentially nationalist-driven, while in the latter it is more religiously oriented.

JI has exhibited considerable interest in extending its ideological influence in the Philippines ...

Evidence of links between Moro groups in Mindanao and JI

JI has exhibited considerable interest in extending its ideological influence in the Philippines largely because the country is viewed as a particularly conducive logistical and operational theatre. Not only have corruption and (post-Marcos) popular democratic sensibilities decisively undercut the scope for concerted counter-terrorist action, the minimal Muslim presence outside Mindanao necessarily means there is far less risk to Islamist interests when carrying out attacks. From JI's perspective, working with co-opted local groups in such an environment constitutes a low-risk way of inflicting large-scale civilian damage that can then be levered to operationalise a new hub for trans-regional militant extremism in Southeast Asia.

Of the three groups, it is the ASG that currently appears to be most receptive to JI's ideological advances. The mainstream of the MILF has conspicuously moved to distance itself from any association with the Indonesian-based network, recognising that in the current context of peace talks with Manila, any indication of attachment with JI would be entirely counter-productive. Indeed, according to Ghazali Jafar, the Front's Vice Chairman for Political Affairs: 'JI is very much a concern of the MILF now because it is hurting the interests of the Bangsamoro people. It is a problem today and will be a problem in the future.'³⁶

Certain commentators have suggested that MILF's past connections with JI were a product of the group's Islamist orientation under Salamat.³⁷ While it is certainly debatable as to whether this predisposition necessarily translated to a common affinity for pan-regional jihadism, it would appear that the current MILF leader has no such interest. As noted above, since assuming the mantle of Chairman in 2003, Al Haj Murad has pursued a highly pragmatic approach to the Moro struggle, focusing almost exclusively on securing local economic and political objectives (rather than pursuing a cross-border religious agenda).

The one complicating factor in this portrayal of the MILF is the attitude of renegade base commanders. According to certain Philippine and Western officials, these splinter factions—which together could amount to 10% of the MILF—not only forcibly reject the current leadership posture of Murad, they also purportedly interpret the conflict in Mindanao as part of a wider pan-Islamist campaign aimed against secularism, modernity, capitalism and the influx of Western values into Southeast Asia. It remains unclear, however, what influence these renegade factions retain and the extent to which they are actively (as opposed to

rhetorically) seeking to integrate their own agendas with that of JI. The evidence is that ties were as much pragmatic or tactical in nature as defined in specific ideological terms.

Links between the MBG and JI would appear to be equally questionable. As noted, Misuari dissidents are primarily motivated to seek the full implementation of the 1996 peace agreement, meaning that their agenda is both local and ethno-nationalist. Although the MNLF has traditionally sought succour from the wider Islamic world, this outward-oriented posture has always been directed at underscoring the legitimacy of the Moro claim to self-government. There is nothing to suggest that radicals connected to the MBG view their struggle any differently and while they have tactically cooperated with the ASG there is no evidence that they have been prepared to tap into regional jihadist networks to underwrite their activities.

The ASG, by contrast, appears to have gravitated more towards JI. As noted, over the past four years explicit efforts have been made to reinvigorate the organisation as a bona fide and integrated jihadist force by returning the movement to its roots and re-capturing the essence of the internationalist orientation that marked its early years under the direction of Abdurajak Janjalini. Ideologically tying ASG to JI is viewed as integral to this objective, as it would validate the group's religious credentials and, thereby, elevate its appeal to a more expansive Southeast Asian militant Muslim community.

The growing nexus between the ASG and JI can be evidenced in several respects. It is now known, for instance, that the two groups jointly collaborated in several of the more recent terrorist incidents that have occurred in the Philippines, including the 2004 attack on *SuperFerry 14* and the 2005 Valentine Day bombings. According to military and intelligence sources, three of the five most wanted JI men in Southeast Asia, Patek, Kuncoro and Dulmatin, are currently based in areas under ASG control. Those factors would seem to indicate an organisation that, if not in its entirety at least in its core, is moving to extend its operational and ideological relevance beyond purely localised agendas and settings. As one Western police official observed in the aftermath of the Valentine Day bombings: 'The ASG has never had a presence or interest in [Manila] before. So why now?' His hypothesis was that the group had decisively gravitated to JI and was now conducting operations specifically designed to have a larger, regional geo-political impact.³⁸ In similar vein, the ICG talks of the emergence of a new generation of Mindanao militants who not only seek to wreak havoc against the Philippine state, but emboldened by their interaction with JI, are also once again emphasising the *salafi-jihadi* tradition of *ahl al-thughoor*: warriors defending the periphery of the Muslim world and fighting to reclaim territories (local and extra-regional) previously lost to Islam.³⁹



Chapter 4

MALAY MUSLIM MILITANCY IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Militant context

Separatist violence in the Malay-Muslim provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani in southern Thailand is not new, with a history that dates back nearly half a century.⁴⁰ However, the scale and tempo of unrest in this part of the world has dramatically escalated since 2004 to the extent that Thailand's 'deep south' is now in the grips of what amounts to fully-fledged ethno-religious terrorist insurgency. Between January 2004 and the end of August 2007, 7,743 incidents were recorded in the region, leaving 2,566 people dead (which equates to an average of fifty-eight a month or roughly two a day) and a further 4,187 wounded (see Figure 1). Although civilians have been the hardest hit (accounting for more than 70% of all fatalities), both the police and military have also suffered significant losses, with casualties of 711 and 689, respectively (see Figure 2).⁴¹ For a regional population of only 1.8 million, these figures represent a considerable toll.

Unlike the earlier phases of religious and ethnic violence, there does not seem to be a centralised organisational nucleus of defined groupings behind the current bout of insurgent and terrorist activity. According to most commentators, the attacks are the work of an amalgam of militants drawn from the decimated ranks of first-generation insurgent groupings⁴² and emergent ad-hoc Islamist entities such as the Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Patani and the Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani⁴³, combined with an amorphous collection of disaffected youths, out of work farmers, labourers and tradesmen and co-opted criminal elements.⁴⁴

According to Thai police and non-government agencies, this amorphous militant base is organised at the district level and based

Photo opposite: A Thai soldier patrols next to The Giant Buddha Statue at Khao Kong Temple, Narathiwat province, Thailand, 22 May 2007. More than 2,100 people have been killed since January 2004 in the southern provinces of Thailand. © Chumsak Kanoknan/Getty Images

on five functional divisions: political work and recruitment; economic and financial affairs; women’s affairs; youth; and armed activity.⁴⁵ Command and control of these wings falls to a *pemimpen* (literally, district chief), who oversees five assistant *pemimpen*, each of which has five deputies that are, in turn, responsible for a village-based cell of ten commandos (*junwae jihad*). Although district strike forces typically act independently of one another—deciding for themselves who to hit and when—leaders are thought to meet every forty-five days to confer on developments taking place in their individual operational zones and/or to plan large-scale attacks. It is not known, however, whether a higher leadership structure exists to provide greater strategic guidance and direction for these operational units. As one Thai official has remarked, ‘this is the key unknown that the security and intelligence services still have to uncover.’⁴⁶

Figure 1: Violent incidents in southern Thailand: January 2004 – August 2007

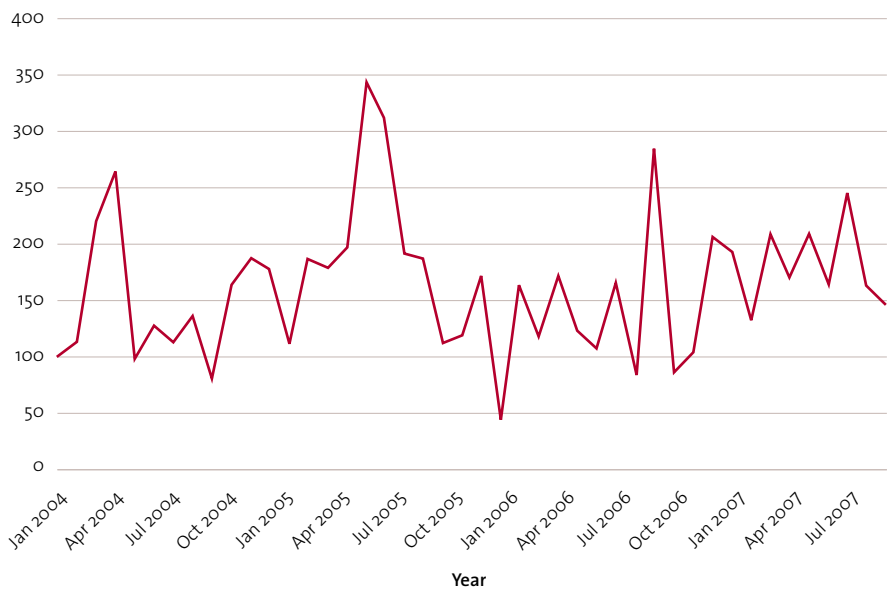
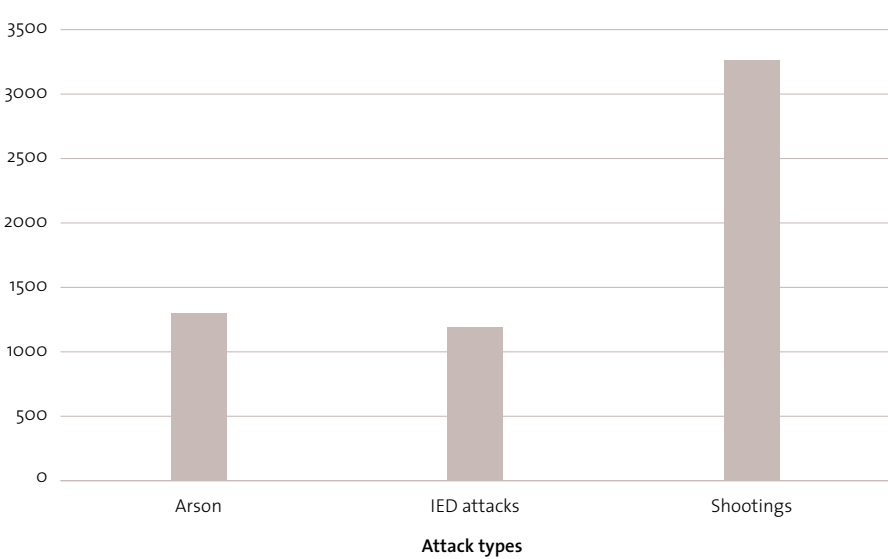


Figure 2: Number of incidents by attack type, January 2004 – September 2005



Actual attacks are reportedly executed by dedicated military wings known as *junwae jihad* in Malay and *Runda Kumpulan Kecil* in Thai, whose members are reputedly trained in unarmed combat, weapons handling, bomb-making and sharp-shooting. Available munitions for these squads include grenade launchers, M16 or AK47 assault rifles, shotguns, pistols, machetes and knives—most of which are either locally made, stolen from the security forces, or purchased from corrupt/co-opted self-defence militia units.

Estimates of the number of people actively engaged in violent attacks vary from 1,000 to 4,000. If logistical, recruiting and propaganda personnel are included, the figure rises to more than 3,000—expanding to anywhere between 5,000 and 30,000 if passive civil support is also factored in. By September 2007, Thai security officials were estimating that separatists had gained full control of more than 100 of the 1,521 villages⁴⁷ in the three southern Malay border provinces. Independent local commentators, however, have generally portrayed a far broader militant presence, with most concurring that more than 90% of the towns and hamlets in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat probably have at least one established cell within their confines.

The ostensible goal of the current insurgency appears to be the creation of a separate Malay–Muslim state within five years (dating from 1 January 2004). The supposed 1,000-day plan, discovered during a 2006 search at an Islamic school in Pattani, was allegedly developed by Masae Useng, a former Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) member who is wanted in connection with an arms robbery in Narathiwat.⁴⁸ Beyond this basic objective, the insurgency does not seem to be guided by any overarching strategy other than one of fostering communal hatred between Muslims and Buddhists and making the southern Malay provinces ungovernable.



Despite lacking clear organisational coherence and strategic direction, Malay Muslim rebels currently operating in southern Thailand have clearly taken their campaign of violence to a level of sophistication and, at times, ruthlessness, not seen in the past. There are indications that militants now possess the means to both produce and deploy relatively large bombs. For instance, the improvised explosive device (IED) that was used in the March 2008 bombing of the CS Pattani (a hotel that hitherto had been generally regarded as ‘off-limits’ to militant attacks), involved three fire extinguishers filled with a mix of ammonium nitrate packed in a car. This contrasts with earlier IEDs, most of which were in the five- to ten-kilogram range and concealed in simple everyday items such as shopping bags, Tupperware lunch boxes and PVC tubing.⁴⁹ Apart from size, the construction of the bombs is also more sophisticated. This has been most apparent with mobile phones, which are now routinely used to trigger IEDs.⁵⁰ These mechanisms are generally recognised as being far more effective than the older, Chinese-made analogue clocks extremists traditionally relied on, not least because they allow for external detonations in clear line of sight of a specific target and at a particular time.⁵¹

The ability to pull off audacious and complex terrorist operations has also expanded. Attacks now often embrace explosions, arson, assassinations and random shootings to maximise the overall impact. Coordinated bombings are also more regular. In one notable case in April 2005, simultaneous explosions struck the Hat Yai International Airport, the French-owned Carrefour supermarket and the Green Palace World Hotel in Songkhla. The attacks generated widespread concern—both in Thailand and across the region—not least because they represented the first time that Malay extremists had struck outside the insurgent-plagued provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat.⁵² Another highly publicised incident involved coordinated bombings of twenty-two commercial banks in Yala town in August 2006.⁵³ Interestingly, two of the facilities that were struck were Muslim owned, which surprised a number of observers. However, the fact that both banks were Thai developed suggests that the motivation was still related to the basic Malay ethno-nationalist struggle against Bangkok.

Finally, the current instability in the south has been marked by an explicit religious-jihadist undertone of a sort not apparent in past years. This undertone has been reflected in attacks against establishments associated with Western decadence and secularism such as gambling halls and karaoke bars; the distribution of leaflets (allegedly printed in Malaysia) specifically warning locals of reprisals if they don’t adopt traditional Islamic practices and the increased targeting of monks and other Buddhist civilians—often through highly brutal means such as burnings and beheadings. In an apparent *Taliban*-style effort, such attacks are intended to destroy societal fabric by fostering communal fear, conflict and hatred against Muslims seen as ‘*monafique*’ (literally hypocrites to the faith).

Evidence of links between Malay Muslim radicals and JI

Several commentators in Western and regional government, intelligence and academic circles have expressed concern that the altered and more acute nature of post-2004 unrest in the Malay Muslim provinces is indicative of a growing JI ideological and operational presence, similar to that which appears to be impacting on the ASG in the southern Philippines. It is reasonable to speculate that JI has attempted to exploit the on-going unrest in southern Thailand for its own purposes. Gaining an ideological presence in this kind of environment is a well recognised and established practice of the movement, and one that was integral to the institution of the *mantiqi* cell structure that characterised its operational development from the late 1990s onwards.

However, no concrete evidence exists to suggest the region has been decisively transformed into a new beachhead for pan-regional *jihadism*. Although there is a definite religious element to many of the terrorist attacks perpetrated in the three Malay provinces, this does not appear to have altered the essential localised and nationalistic aspect of the conflict. The objective remains focused on protecting the region's unique cultural identity and traditional way of life—both from the (perceived) unjust incursions of the Thai Buddhist state and, just as importantly, the unprecedented influx of cross-border movements of trade, commerce and people. Indeed, there appears to have been an explicit decision by militants not to associate themselves with external, non-Malay entities such as JI. In the words of Mah (not his real name), a self-professed senior BRN operational commander:

We do not want to have anything to do with these guys [JI]; they are bad news. I told them we are only interested in looking after our own territory ... Many of our top tok kuru (literally headmasters of Islamic boarding schools) believe that if Indonesians become involved [in our struggle] we will be like Iraq—a place where Muslims kill Muslims.⁵⁴

The overriding sense of self-identity that characterises the southern border provinces strongly suggests that an in-built barrier against external penetration is firmly in place. Informed journalists, academics and security officials routinely stress how difficult it would be for a foreign-based entity like JI to come to the region and introduce (much less entrench) its ideology, noting that the indigenous population would be extremely unlikely to accept any sort of proselytism that emphasised there was a 'better' or purer form of Islam to the one already there. As one well-respected *mufti* in Pattani remarked, 'our people may not be respected in the formal sense, but they have an unshakable understanding of their faith.'

Although it is true that the scale and sophistication of the violence has increased, there is nothing to link this change in tempo to the input of punitive, absolutist JI imperatives. Indeed in the opinion of local commentators, the heightened intensity of attacks merely reflects a process of learning and development on the part of indigenous rebel groups, possibly combined with the infusion of an increasingly competitive criminal interplay involving gambling syndicates, drug lords and corrupt members of the security forces and political elite. These same sources also argue that marked violence—far from being propagated from outside—is an integral component of (current) extremist Malay strategy in at least three, inter-related respects: (1) to scare the local population (fear being one of the main tactics employed to control villagers); (2) to demonstrate that active rebel groups can act with impunity; and (3) to highlight the general weaknesses of the Thai state.

Perhaps the clearest reason to believe that the southern Thai conflict has not metastasised into a broader jihadist struggle, however, is that there has been no migration of violence north (much less to other parts of Southeast Asia such as Malaysia) nor direct attacks against foreigners, tourist resorts or overt symbols of American 'cultural capitalism' such as *McDonalds*, *Starbucks* or the *Hard Rock Café*.

By contrast, there appears to have been a deliberate strategic decision on the part of militants to explicitly *not* tie the Malay cause to wider Islamic anti-Western/secular designs for fear of the wider ramifications this might entail. This was perhaps best reflected in one statement by Kasturi Mahkota, a former Pattani United Liberation Organisation member who now claims to act as the self-defined 'foreign affairs spokesman' of the southern insurgency: 'There is no interest in taking operations to Bangkok or Phuket. We do not need to be on anyone's terrorist list. Once we are on that list, it is all over.'⁵⁵



Chapter 5

CURRENT TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

The Islamist terrorist threat across Southeast Asia has not developed, and nor will it evolve, in a predictable or linear fashion. Southeast Asian terrorist groups have shown themselves to be adaptive and resilient in the face of external disruption and internal divisions. Al-Qaeda's global message of religious violence and intolerance continues to resonate amongst a small percentage of the Islamic community, particularly in those relatively stateless areas of endemic conflict such as the southern Philippines and in remote areas of the Indonesian archipelago. The radicalisation of individuals and groups through new media outlets and mediums such as the internet and online publications further exacerbates what are already complex militant recruitment and indoctrination patterns.

Aside from some recent operational links to the Abu Sayyaf Group in the southern Philippines, JI has been unable to co-opt the two major non-Indonesian ethno-religious struggles in Southeast Asia to engineer a single zone of conflict.

That said, JI's organisational structure and its ability to conduct large-scale terrorist attacks today are vastly different from the original grand strategic designs of Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Bashir of the early 1990s. The *Mantiqi* system is unachievable and

Photo opposite: Convicted Bali bombers Amrozi (bottom) and Imam Samudra alias Abdul Aziz talk during a family visit in Batu prison, Nusa Kambangan Island, 22 November 2007. © Beawiharta/Reuters/Picture Media

probably abandoned. Aside from some recent operational links to the Abu Sayyaf Group in the southern Philippines, JI has been unable to co-opt the two major non-Indonesian ethno-religious struggles in Southeast Asia to engineer a single zone of conflict. The idea that sustained terrorist violence will achieve the political goal of a pan-Islamic caliphate across the Southeast Asian region survives only in the most distorted and unrealistic assessments of the *jihadi* faithful. And the supply of new recruits trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan under the tutelage of al-Qaeda has largely ended. In this sense, the secular, nationalist and democratic project that Indonesia embarked upon only a decade ago has shown itself to be a remarkably successful endeavour and a key pillar of regional security and stability.

Counter-terrorism efforts, at national, regional and international levels, will continue to have an important bearing on the future direction of the terrorist threat. The Indonesian and Philippines national police, in particular, have made enormous strides in operational capacity and effectiveness against indigenous terrorist organisations. Supported by countries such as Australia and the United States, the counter-terrorism effort will continue to deliver substantial security benefits to the region. However, any diminution of resources or commitment from regional political leaders could create the time and space for major terrorist organisations to re-emerge. After several years of counter-terrorism successes, Mas Selamat's escape from a Singaporean detention facility in March 2008 was a timely reminder that there is no room for complacency in the fight against terrorism.

Several conclusions concerning the current threat of Islamist terrorism in Southeast Asia can be drawn from this analysis. First, there is scant evidence that the JI leadership in Indonesia (much less al-Qaeda internationally) has been able to elevate the conflicts in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Mindanao to a more serious level. In southern Thailand, Malay-Muslim separatists appear to have no interest in externalising their campaign of violence, while in the southern Philippines it is only ASG—a disaggregated and operationally weak organisation—that has in any way gravitated toward JI's logistical designs. Although some of the leaders in those conflicts employ the rhetoric of global Islamist violence and draw on similar historical experiences from the Middle East and elsewhere, local ethnic and family ties appear to be as strong, if not stronger, in binding these groups together.

Second, the policy response of national governments will have an important bearing on the future direction of ethno-religious conflicts in the region. More specifically, the manner in which Thailand and the Philippines deal with separatist claims for independence and greater political autonomy is liable to impact on the scale and frequency of future terrorist attacks. The 2002 dissolution of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre by the former administration of Thaksin Shinawatra, for example, was widely seen by many commentators as a backward step in Bangkok's efforts to build a more sustainable peace settlement between the Muslim south and the Buddhist north. Although expectations of a more meaningful policy mix were raised following the September 2006 military coup led by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the current government under Samak Sundaravej's People's Power Party appears more intent on consolidating its position in Bangkok than comprehensively addressing Muslim grievances in the 'deep south'. Similarly, in the Philippines, should negotiations between the Arroyo government and the MILF fail to secure a final settlement agreement by the end of 2008, it is likely the region will witness a major return to violence, quite possibly on a scale not previously encountered.

A third broad conclusion concerns the potential radicalising influence of external groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT). JI's current organisational weaknesses and lull in operations

have provided the opportunity for other Islamist groups to engage more directly in the political processes of Southeast Asian countries. According to Western diplomats and Malaysian political commentators, the group has already made inroads into Malay society and is now actively recruiting from prominent tertiary education institutions such as the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM—a significant past source of both al-Qaeda and JI militants).⁵⁶ In 2007, HuT managed to organise a rally at a stadium in central Jakarta which was attended by more than 70,000 people. Although some commentators dismissed this event as a 'rent-a-crowd' phenomenon or a case of youthful curiosity, evidence from the group's activities in the United Kingdom and elsewhere shows that these events can be instrumental in building a general base of support for the dissemination of radical ideas and action. As the former HuT organiser in Britain, Ed Husain, notes in his recent book *The Islamist*: 'Hizb ut-Tahrir encourages individuals to form an army dedicated to a prolonged military campaign...the differences from vigilantism are simply of time and scale.'⁵⁷ In addition to public rallies and support for university campus groups, HuT has also developed a sophisticated publishing business that disseminates information to a wide global audience. Likewise, the re-emergence of violent jihadist literature in Indonesia through glossy new publications such as *Jihadmagz* is a concerning trend and one that will need to be monitored closely.

The final and perhaps clearest conclusion is that jihadist violence throughout Southeast Asia has been cyclical since the 1940s. Both of the conflicts discussed in this paper, and JI itself, trace their origins back at least sixty years and are deeply ingrained in the history of ethno-religious struggles throughout the region. Periods of internal destabilisation, such as the immediate post-Soeharto period in Indonesia or the current political instability in Thailand, provide opportunities for Islamist groups to exploit religious differences for political goals. Where religious conflict is held in check, either through negotiated political settlements or through more direct military means, the opportunities for religious exploitation are more limited. Given the nascent state of democracy in the region, the cycle of conflict and conciliation can be expected to continue.

One of the key priorities for the new Rudd government in Australia will be to balance the ongoing counter-terrorism effort with a broader policy of comprehensive regional engagement.

Policy implications for Australia

The evolution of the radical Islamist threat in Southeast Asia has important implications for Australia's foreign and security policies. Since 2002, bilateral counter-terrorism efforts have been at the forefront of Australia's relations with many ASEAN states, including Indonesia and the Philippines. In addition to the negotiation of separate bilateral memoranda of understanding on joint counter-terrorism cooperation, the entry into force of the Lombok Treaty in February 2008 has committed Australia to a further investment of resources on a range of security-related issues with Indonesia, including counter-terrorism operations, intelligence cooperation and maritime security.

Current counter-terrorism capacity-building initiatives in Southeast Asia*

Attorney-General's Department

Budget measure: Providing for Australia's Security—regional counter-terrorism assistance; legal assistance

Funding: \$6.8 million under the 2005–06 budget over four years—lapses June 2009

Description: Establishment and operation of a Regional Legal Assistance Unit in the Attorney-General's Department to assist countries in Australia's region develop and improve legal frameworks to combat terrorism and provide effective international crime cooperation, especially mutual legal assistance and extradition.

Australian Customs Service (ACS)

Budget measure: Providing for Australia's Security—regional counter-terrorism assistance; improved border control in the Sulu and Celebes Seas region

Funding: \$4.1 million under the 2005–06 budget over four years—lapses June 2009

Description: To improve border controls in the Sulu and Celebes Seas region (Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines) through the delivery of projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of relevant agencies to manage national borders, improve interagency communication between border agencies, and a range of maritime security initiatives.

Budget measure: National Security—improved border control in the Southeast Asian region

Funding: \$7.1 million under the 2006–07 budget over three years—lapses June 2009

Description: To improve border controls in Southeast Asia including Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand.

Australian Federal Police (AFP)

Budget measure: Investing in Australia's Security—Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation

Funding: \$36.8 million under the 2004–05 budget over five years—lapses June 2009

Description: Establishment and operation of the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement and Cooperation (JCLEC).

Budget measure: Investing in Australia's Security—rapid deployment capability

Funding: \$36.8 million under the 2004–05 budget over four years—lapses June 2008

Description: Responding to terrorist attacks in the region and strengthening regional law enforcement counter-terrorism capabilities.

Budget measure: National Security—regional law enforcement liaison and capacity building

Funding: \$25 million under the 2006–07 budget over four years—lapses June 2010

Description: To enhance the capacity and skills of regional law enforcement officers in investigating and countering terrorism.

Budget measure: National Security—counter-terrorism rapid deployment capability

Funding: \$34.1 million under the 2008–09 budget over four years—lapses June 2012

Description: To develop the Australian Federal Police's capacity to respond to terrorist attacks in regional countries and to assist in strengthening the counter-terrorism capabilities of regional law enforcement partners.

Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO)

Budget measure: National Security—improving nuclear and radiological security

Funding: \$5.1 million under the 2006–07 budget over four years—lapses June 2010

— ANSTO: \$2 million

— ARPANSA: \$1.7 million

— ASNO: \$1.4 million

Description: To provide coordinated capacity-building activities in the Asia-Pacific region, through workshops, exercises and other education programmes to secure radioactive sources, nuclear material and related facilities.

Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC)

Budget measure: Investing in Australia's Security—strengthening regional financial intelligence units

Funding: \$10 million under the 2004–05 budget over four years—lapses June 2008

Description: AUSTRAC assistance is helping to build the capacity of regional financial intelligence and additional activity to strengthen the regional anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing environment.

Budget measure: Overseas development assistance—strengthening regional financial intelligence units

Funding: \$5.5 million under the 2008–09 budget over two years—lapses June 2010

Description: To provide capacity-building assistance to South-East Asia Financial Intelligence Unit counterparts for the detection and deterrence of money laundering and terrorism financing. This measure will also assist the development and implementation of IT solutions aimed at identifying terrorism financing activities.

Continued on next page

Current counter-terrorism capacity-building initiatives in Southeast Asia *continued*

Department of Defence

Budget measure: Investing in Australia's Security—enhanced regional consequence management training

Funding: \$0.7 million under the 2004–05 budget, absorbed for expenditure over four years (to June 2008)

Description: To provide counter-terrorism consequence management training with regional countries.

Budget measure: Investing in Australia's Security—enhanced regional cooperation

Funding: \$0.8 million under the 2004–05 budget, absorbed for expenditure over four years

Description: To enhance cooperation with regional counterparts on regional counter-terrorism issues.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

Budget measure: National Security—strengthening regional counter-terrorism capacity

Funding: \$35 million under the 2006–07 budget over four years—lapses June 2010

Description: To improve coordination with counter-terrorism partners; work against the threat of terrorists acquiring, developing or using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons; build regional emergency response coordination mechanisms; and work with regional governments to promote tolerance and counteract terrorist propaganda.

Department of Infrastructure (Office of Transport Security)

Budget measure: Providing for Australia's Security—regional counter-terrorism assistance; transport security liaison

Funding: \$6 million under the 2005–06 budget, to be absorbed over four years

Description: To strengthen relationships with transport security counterparts in Southeast Asia and the Pacific and identify capacity-building projects that assist regional governments bring aviation and maritime security up to world standards.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)

Budget measure: Providing for Australia's security—regional counter-terrorism assistance; regional border control

Funding: \$11.8 million under the 2005–06 budget over four years—lapses June 2009

Description: Enhancement of regional document fraud detection and immigration intelligence capabilities, particularly in detecting document fraud and analysing immigration data to produce intelligence. The programs have covered more than twenty countries, mostly in the Asia-Pacific.

Budget measure: National Security—enhancing the Regional Movement Alert List

Funding: \$10.9 million under 2006–07 budget over four years—lapses June 2010

Description: To provide real-time access between countries on accurate and up-to-date lost, stolen and otherwise invalid passport data. Developed through APEC: Australia, the US and New Zealand currently participate; other countries have indicated a willingness to join.

Budget measure: National Security—enhancing the Indonesian movement alert list system

Funding: \$10.1 million under the 2006–07 budget, absorbed by DIAC. Project currently due for completion in June 2008

NB: an additional \$2.6 million was provided under the 2008–09 budget to further support and fund maintenance for Indonesia's movement alert list system until 30 June 2011.

Description: The Enhanced CEKAL System project is rebuilding Indonesia's movement alert system at five major ports and at Immigration headquarters in Jakarta. When implemented, it will cover approximately 85% of passenger movements into and out of Indonesia. The system design allows future scalable roll-out to other ports and embassies.

* For a full list of policy initiatives see individual departments or agencies

One of the key priorities for the new Rudd government in Australia will be to balance ongoing bilateral counter-terrorism efforts with a broader policy of comprehensive regional engagement. The central priorities driving this need, however, are not ones that Australia and the countries of Southeast Asia have typically relied on to build partnerships in the past. For policy makers in Canberra, closer intelligence and law enforcement cooperation with non-traditional partners, for example, continues to present difficulties. In part, those problems are a function of Australia's historical alliance responsibilities and previous willingness to act outside traditional multilateral structures in support of security interests. Some of these issues have been addressed through stronger people-to-people linkages established after the 2002 Bali bombings. This is particularly true of the relationship between the Australian Federal Police and the Indonesian National Police (POLRI), which has developed into a close and enduring partnership, evidenced by facilities such as the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation in Semarang. But engagement efforts will need to overcome the occasional cautiousness that characterises elements of the regional political dialogue.

Although political agreement to strengthen legal frameworks was reached at the 2007 Jakarta ministerial meeting, many Southeast Asian countries have yet to enact international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.

Complacency will remain one of the biggest challenges Australia faces in pursuing its counter-terrorism strategies in the region. There are already some signs of this in Indonesia. Despite the high levels of financial commitment devoted to capacity building in POLRI, potentially useful facilities such as the Multinational Operational Support Team (MNOST)⁵⁸ and the Bomb Data Centre remain underutilised and understaffed. According to one Indonesian analyst, elements of the political leadership in Jakarta believe that the terrorist problem has diminished and that further counter-terrorism initiatives against JI are unwarranted or, at the very least, are unnecessary. Moreover, there appears to be little genuine effort across the Indonesian Government to understand the underlying support dynamics or the continuing role of religious schools associated with the JI movement and affiliated jihadist groups. Similarly, Philippine Government officials now believe the Moro Muslim terrorist threat is in its last throes and that it has been surpassed by the re-emergent Communist insurgency. As noted above, however, should current talks with the MILF fail to bear dividends, a major return to violence in Mindanao is likely.

In order to sustain Australia's counter-terrorism efforts in the region, and to support the country's broader national security interests, several policy developments should be considered. First, Canberra will need to demonstrate a long-term political commitment to multilateral security cooperation as a central pillar of regional engagement. Bilateral counter-terrorism initiatives will remain an important cornerstone of this endeavour. But it will also require a more concerted effort to bring the individual elements of Australia's regional counter-terrorism policy into a single program of action. To this end, Australia should consider hosting another round of ministerial-level talks that would continue the work of the previous sub-regional ministerial conference held in March 2007. A particular focus for this meeting would be dealing with the recent upsurge in *jihadist* publications as part of a more comprehensive counter-radicalisation strategy across the region.

Second, Australia could lead a diplomatic campaign to have all ten ASEAN countries sign and ratify each of the thirteen United Nations conventions dealing with counter-terrorism. Although political agreement to strengthen legal frameworks was reached at the 2007 Jakarta ministerial meeting, many Southeast Asian countries have yet to enact international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism. As the following table shows, these include accords on hostages, nuclear materials, plastic explosives and nuclear terrorism. Although signing international conventions will not, by itself, lead to a diminished terrorist threat, it will help to consolidate international legal norms that criminalise terrorist behaviour.

Table 4: Status of participation by ASEAN member states in the 13 universal instruments related to the prevention and suppression of terrorism													
Member States	Aircraft Convention (1963)	Unlawful Seizure Convention (1970)	Civil Aviation Convention (1971)	Diplomatic Agents Convention (1973)	Hostages Convention (1979)	Nuclear Materials Convention (1980)	Airport Convention (1988)	Maritime Convention (1988)	Fixed Platform Protocol (1988)	Plastic Explosives Convention (1991)	Terrorist Bombing Convention (1997)	Terrorist Financing Convention (1999)	Nuclear Terrorism Convention (2005)
Brunei Darussalam	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	
Cambodia	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Indonesia	x	x	x			x					x	x	
Lao DPR	x	x	x	x	x		x				x		
Malaysia	x	x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	
Myanmar	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Philippines	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Singapore	x	x	x	x			x	x		x		x	
Thailand	x	x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	
Vietnam	x	x	x	x			x	x	x			x	

Third, Australia needs to pay close attention to the internal dynamics of states not presently afflicted by Muslim conflicts but which may come to play an important role in fostering or otherwise facilitating hardline jihadist designs. Cambodia, for example, has often been identified as a potential logistical hub for Islamic extremism because of its lax border control, endemic corruption, entrenched criminal activity and existence of a small but substantial Muslim population. Although there is no evidence, to date, that international or regional terrorists have managed to gain a foothold in Cambodia by co-opting local Muslims, this could change should the Hun Sen regime move to institute draconian domestic security policies in response to a perceived extremist threat. Although presently an unlikely prospect, a violent overreaction on the part of Phnom Penh could lead to a dangerous radicalisation of a Muslim minority community that continues to exist against a backdrop of real socioeconomic marginalisation. This at least partially explains the surge of violence that has been so prominent in southern Thailand since 2004 and that could certainly be seen as a precursor of what might occur in Cambodia under similar circumstances.

Another state to watch is Malaysia, where it has become increasingly apparent that radical Islam is being fuelled, somewhat paradoxically, by the policies of the central administration. Various commentators have observed that a troubling ‘enabling environment’ for extremism may have begun to surface as a result of the polemics of the ruling United Malays National Organisation, which aims to give institutional expression to a more fundamentalist ideology in order to win the Malay ethnic vote and, thereby, outflank the Parti Se-Islam Malaysia

opposition.⁵⁹ Moreover, Malaysia has produced some of JI's most infamous leaders, including Top, Husin and Marwan, and in certain quarters the residual pull of a pan-Islamic outlook remains strong—perhaps best reflected by the growing visibility of HuT at campuses such as UTM. Both suggest a latent potential for JI-type radicalisation exists in the country and that close attention will therefore need to be focused on domestic religious developments—particularly as they relate to the overall course of Islamic revivalism currently taking place within the indigenous Malay community.

A fourth initiative would be to assist Indonesia and other regional countries with legal reforms that would ban terrorist organisations such as JI. Senior Indonesian officials, including Inspector General Ansyad Mbai from the Office of the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal and Security Affairs, have advocated this type of action for some time. It is noteworthy that despite a recent statement by the prosecuting judge in the sentencing of Abu Dujana and Zarkasih that JI was a 'forbidden organisation', Jakarta has still to formally proscribe the movement under Indonesian law. Helping Southeast Asian states develop stronger penalties for terrorist offences and/or clearer standards on what constitutes admissible evidence in court would also be useful in terms of strengthening legislative tools available for countering militant extremism in the region.

Finally, Australia should give further consideration to supporting alternative education programs for Indonesian students currently enrolled in the thirty-six *pesantren* that are known to be associated with JI in central and East Java. In particular, Pondok Ngruki remains a potential source of future jihadi recruits because of its continuing propagation of a hardline Islamist curriculum. Although the Australian Government has committed \$30 million (to be disbursed over the five-year period from 2004–09) on learning assistance programs for Islamic schools in Indonesia, with more than 40,000 *madrasah* scattered across the country this money is thinly spread. A more targeted funding initiative specifically aimed at influencing the curriculum of JI-related schools would have potentially greater payoffs in terms of turning young Indonesians away from the jihadist pathway. While certainly not an easy task and one that would need to be closely coordinated with the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, stopping the propagation of subverted Islamist ideas through the educational system is a critical element in the long-term fight against religious extremism in Southeast Asia.

Endnotes

- 1 ASIO, *Annual Report to Parliament 2004–05*, 3, available from: http://www.asio.gov.au/Publications/Content/AnnualReport04_05/pdf/asio_annual_report_to_parliament_0405.pdf
- 2 In this study, 'Islamist' is used when describing Islam as a political phenomenon. It is distinguished from 'Islamic' which is more correctly understood as signifying religion and culture. For more on these terms see Guillaín Denoeux, 'The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam', *Middle East Policy*, (June 2002).
- 3 It is important to note that there are many manifestations of political violence in Southeast Asia besides those connected with militant Islam. However, given the current focus on extremist Muslim entities and their perceived import for the war on terror, this report will limit itself only to groups whose defining agenda is in some way related to extremist ethno-religious designs.
- 4 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia: The Case of the 'Ngruki Network'* (Asia Briefing 20, August 2002).
- 5 *Pedoman Umum Perjuangan Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyyah* (PUPJI), Chapter 5.
- 6 PUPJI, 3, 37–44, 51–52. PUPJI, itself, outlines ten main theological principles, four of which are particularly pertinent to JI's ideological outlook: #4: Return of the Caliphate; #5: Faith, migration and jihad, #7: Allegiance and non-allegiance; #10: Islam in totality. Comments made during the US Pacific Command (PACOM) Southeast Asia Violent Ideology Strategy Seminar, San Antonio, October 31 – November 1, 2006.
- 7 PUPJI, 28; Rohan Gunaratna, Elena Pavlova and Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, 'A preliminary analysis of the general guide for the struggle of Jemaah Islamiyah,' unpublished paper prepared at the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), Singapore, IV–VI.

- 8 For more on the extent of al-Qaeda's reputed links with JI and other Islamist entities in Southeast Asia see Zachary Abuza, *Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian Network* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003).
- 9 'Indonesia: Radical to be freed,' *The New York Times*, June 6, 2006. Bashir has never been tried with any offences specifically relating to the actual perpetration of terrorist attacks. At the time of writing he had been convicted only of criminal conspiracy, for which he received a sentence of 30 months (subsequently commuted to 20 months); he was released from prison in June 2006.
- 10 Parkaj Jha, 'Jemaah Islamiyah: Survival in question following high profile arrests,' *Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict* 123 (June 2007), available from: http://www.sspconline.org/article_detail.asp?artid=art136.
- 11 *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Future of Terrorism* (Government of Singapore White Paper, January 7, 2003).
- 12 Mark Manyin et al., *Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, RL31672, August 13, 2004), 9.
- 13 ICG, 'Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's current status,' *Asia Briefing* 63 (May 2007).
- 14 Mas Selamat escaped from the Whitley Road detention centre where he was being held in Singapore on February 27, 2008. At the time of writing he was the subject of an INTERPOL international arrest alert. For an overview of this episode and the possible implications of Selamat's escape see B Raman, 'Mas Selamat: Play it down, play it cool,' *International Terrorism Monitor*, Paper No. 376 (March 2, 2008).
- 15 Zachary Abuza, 'The state of Jemaah Islamiyah: Terrorism and insurgency in Southeast Asia five years after Bali,' The Jebson Center for Counter Terrorism Studies Research Briefing Series 2/1 (November 2007): 2–3.
- 16 ICG, 'Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's current status,' 13; Barton, 'Making sense of the Indonesian Jihadi Terrorist Group Jemaah Islamiyah'; Abuza, 'The state of Jemaah Islamiyah: Terrorism and insurgency in Southeast Asia five years after Bali', 2.
- 17 Briefing by Singaporean intelligence officials, April 2005. See also Sidney Jones, 'Arrested Development', *Jane's Intelligence Review* (August 2007), 24.
- 18 See ICG, *Terrorism in Indonesia: Noordin's Networks*, 1; and ICG, 'Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's current status', 14. Top has also variously referred to his group as Anshar el-Muslimin and Thoifah Muqotilah.
- 19 The bombing of the Jakarta Stock Exchange was allegedly modelled after Ramzi Yousef's 1993 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. Like the latter, however, it failed to elicit large-scale structural damage due to insufficient explosives.
- 20 These attacks are generally referred to as the Christmas Eve bombings.
- 21 It was the Singapore Plot that first alerted security and intelligence officials in Southeast Asia to the formal existence of JI. For further details see Rohan Gunaratna, 'The Singapore Connection', *Jane's Intelligence Review* (March 2002): 10–11.

- 22 The improvised explosive devices (IEDs) used in these attacks were typically in the order of 100+ kilos and composed out of a mixture of ammonium nitrate, potassium chlorate, diesel fuel, combined with a TNT booster charge.
- 23 Barton, 'Making sense of the Indonesian Jihadi Terrorist Group Jemaah Islamiyah'; Jones, 'Arrested development', 22; Zachary Abuza, 'Shifting focus,' *Jane's Intelligence Review* (July 2007): 22–26.
- 24 ICG, 'Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's publishing industry', Asia Report 147, 28 February 2008.
- 25 Informally referred to as the Davao Consensus, the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF provided for the creation of a limited ARMM, consisting of the four non-contiguous provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, as well as the city of Marawi. In addition, the accord called for the creation of a wider Special Peace and Development Council (SPDC) that was to be responsible for implementing and overseeing infrastructure development in all 14 provinces of Mindanao. The MNLF was granted governance of ARMM, while Misuari assumed Chairmanship of the SPDC.
- 26 Hashim Salamat, quoted in 'Commissar of the faith,' *Far Eastern Economic Review* (March 28, 1996).
- 27 The substance of this truce is based on an original 'Agreement for general cessation of hostilities' that was signed in Cagayan de Oro in 1997 but which has been repeatedly suspended owing to violations by both the AFP and MILF.
- 28 United States Institute of Peace (USIP), *The Mindanao Peace Talks*, Special Report 131 (January 2005); and ICG, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process*.
- 29 For more on the *Bojinka* plots see 'Asia's own Osama,' *Time Magazine* (April 1, 2002).
- 30 See 'No more ransoms,' *The Economist* (June 2, 2001).
- 31 US support is aimed at Special Forces, Scout Ranger and Marine Corps battalions as well as several army reconnaissance companies and mainly focuses on operations intelligence fusion, unit interoperability, logistics and aspects of engineering, equipment and maintenance. Although American troops are barred from actually engaging in active hostile actions (which is prohibited under the Philippines' Constitution), they do participate in annual counter-terror exercises with the AFP to test and audit imparted techniques, procedures and practices. Known as *Balikitan* (literally 'shoulder-to-shoulder'), these drills have been on-going since 2002. The latest round held in February–March 2008 was devoted exclusively to civil military operations in Basilan, Tawi Tawi and Sulu.
- 32 In fact, indications of a possible ideological re-orientation had begun to emerge from as early as mid-2003. On April 26 of that year, Janjalini reputedly issued a statement emphasising the group's search for *kaadilan* (justice) and called on all Muslims to lay aside their differences and feuds and avenge the oppression, capricious ambitions and arbitrary claims that are imposed on the southern Philippine Islamic community by the 'Christian Liberation Army'.

- 33 Andang was killed while trying to escape from jail in March 2005; Tilao was shot in an off-shore gun battle with Filipino Marines in June 2001. The latter was behind the sensational abduction of twenty hostages from the resort island of Palawan in May 2001, including Americans Martin and Gracia Burnham. For an interesting account of this episode and the events leading up to Tilao's eventual death see Mark Bowden, 'Jihadists in paradise,' *The Atlantic* (March 2007).
- 34 Khadaffi died after sustaining serious injuries during a firefight with the AFP on September 4, 2006; Solaiman was killed by a Special Forces unit on 16 January 2007. Both had carried US\$5 million bounties on their heads.
- 35 Misuari ran ARMM as governor between the signing of the 1996 peace agreement and his arrest in 2002. He initially fled to Sabah following the rebellion, only to be arrested by the Malaysians and handed over to Philippines authorities. Misuari is currently under house arrest in Mindanao.
- 36 Ghazali Jafaar, quoted in Zachary Abuza, 'The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the revolution', paper prepared for the NIC-State/INR/EAP Conference on Mindanao, Washington DC, July 9, 2004, 19.
- 37 Zachary Abuza, 'The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution', paper prepared for the NIC-State/INR/EAP Conference on Mindanao, Washington D.C., July 9, 2004, 14–20.
- 38 Zachary Abuza, 'Balik-Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf', draft paper prepared for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), May 11, 2005, 11–13.
- 39 ICG, *Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Islamic Converts*, 21. See also Oliver Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2004), 53, 112, 312; and Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy, 'Joining the caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia,' *The Lowy Institute for International Policy*, Paper 5 (2005) 115.
- 40 For an overview of the root causes and evolving dynamic of political violence in southern Thailand see Peter Chalk, 'Militant Islamic Separatism in Southern Thailand,' in Jason Isaacson and Colin Rubenstein (eds.), *Islam in Asia* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 165–186.
- 41 These statistics are based on figures maintained by Professor Srisompob at Prince of Songkla University, which are generally recognised as the most comprehensive and accurate data set on violence in southern Thailand currently available.
- 42 These include the Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), New PULO and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN).
- 43 These militants have variously referred to themselves under the collective designation of Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Koordinasi (National Revolutionary Front Co-ordinate).
- 44 Human Rights Watch (HRW), *No One is Safe*, HRW 19/12C, August 2007, 18; Anthony Davis, 'No end in sight for Southern Thailand's escalating insurgency,' *Jane's Intelligence Review* (March 2005): 14. According to one western diplomat in Bangkok, it is the disillusioned youth that are currently acting as 'the major hired guns in the south'.
- 45 Human Rights Watch, *No One Is Safe*, 19/12(C), August 2007, 19.

- 46 Interviews, police and intelligence officials, Bangkok and Pattani, September 2006 and September 2007. There have been allegations that the insurgency is receiving strategic direction from a leadership cadre based in Bangkok; at the time of writing, however, these assertions—which are based on intercepted faxes reputedly sent from the capital to militants in the south—had yet to be proven.
- 47 There are 551 villages (*muban*) in Narathiwat, spread across 13 districts (*amphoe*); in Yala there are 341 villages spread across eight districts; and in Pattani there are 629 villages, spread across 12 districts.
- 48 ‘Suspects in bank attacks identified,’ *The Bangkok Post*, September 04, 2006.
- 49 See Anthony Davis, ‘Thai militants adopt new bombing tactics,’ *Jane’s Intelligence Review* (May 2005), 26.
- 50 According to one analyst in Bangkok, 96% of bomb attacks during 2005 were detonated using cell phones.
- 51 Davis, ‘Thai militants adopt new bombing tactics,’ 27; ‘250 detonators found,’ *The Nation*, February 23, 2005.
- 52 ‘Blasts Hit Airport, Hotel and Carrefour,’ *The Bangkok Post*, April 4, 2005; ‘PM vows justice for South,’ *The Sunday Nation*, April 03, 2005; and ‘Tighter security at airports,’ *The Bangkok Post*, April 05, 2005.
- 53 ‘Bombs hit 22 branches in Yala,’ *The Bangkok Post*, September 01, 2006; ‘Suspects in bank attacks identified,’ *The Bangkok Post*, September 04, 2006; ‘Suspect Was “Paid to Put Bomb in Yala Bank”’, *The Nation*, September 04, 2006.
- 54 Interview statement supplied to authors, Pattani, September 2007.
- 55 Kasturi Mahokota, quoted by Tony Davis in ‘Interview: Kasturi Mahkota,’ *Jane’s Intelligence Review* (September 2006), 54.
- 56 Author interviews, Kuala Lumpur, September 2006.
- 57 Ed Husain, *The Islamist* (London: Penguin, 2007), 153.
- 58 MNOST is meant to act as a fully exploitable intelligence base populated by and disseminated to the six participating states: Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Australia.
- 59 Author interviews, terrorism analysts, Malaysia and Bangkok, August–September 2006. According to the constitution, only practicing Muslims can be Malay; this necessarily means that ethnic politics are automatically defined on a religious basis.

Acronyms

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ARMM	Moro National Liberation Front autonomous area
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
BIAF	Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces
BJE	Bangsamoro Judicial Entity
BRN	Barisan Revolusi Nasional
DI	Darul Islam
HuT	Hizb ut-Tahrir
ICG	International Crisis Group
IED	improvised explosive device
Jl	Jemaah Islamiyah
KFR	kidnap for ransom
MBG	Misuari Breakaway Group
MILF	The Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MNOST	Multinational Operational Support Team
PNP	Philippine National Police
POLRI	Indonesian National Police
PUPJI	Pedoman Umum Perjuangan Al-Jama’ah Al-Islamiyya
RSIM	Rajah Soliaman Islamic Movement
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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Neighbourhood watch

The evolving terrorist threat in Southeast Asia

The regional terrorist threat remains high on the list of Australia's national security priorities. But the absence of a major bombing campaign in recent years has prompted some commentators to argue that we have seen the end of jihadist violence in Southeast Asia. Nearly six years after the first Bali bombings, it is time to take stock of the regional security environment and to ask how the Southeast Asian terrorist threat might evolve in the future.

Neighbourhood Watch analyses the changing nature of religious militancy across Southeast Asia and sets out a framework for understanding the forces and trends that are driving jihadist extremism in the region. It provides a comprehensive examination of the organisational and operational capabilities of the major terrorist groups including Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao and the various groups associated with Malay Muslim separatist violence in southern Thailand. In each case, the nature and extent of pan-regional networks and connections are examined.

Although these groups draw their rhetoric and ideology from the global jihadist movement, this ASPI paper shows that local ethnic and family ties remain a strong influence on group dynamics and linkages. As a result, the JI leadership in Indonesia has failed in its stated efforts to engineer a single zone of regional conflict. And the idea that sustained terrorist violence will achieve the political goal of a pan-Islamic caliphate across the region survives only in the most distorted and unrealistic assessments of the jihadi faithful.

The structure and organisation of these groups may have changed, but the underlying threat of terrorism remains. In particular, the policy responses of national governments will have an important bearing on the future direction of ethno-religious conflicts in the region. Complacency will remain one of the biggest challenges we face in pursuing effective counter-terrorism policies in the region.

Neighbourhood Watch makes a number of recommendations on the appropriate next steps in Australia's regional counter-terrorism strategy including formalising the high-level political dialogue between ministers; paying closer attention to the enabling environment for terrorism in neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Cambodia; leading a regional diplomatic campaign to encourage universal adoption of international counter-terrorism conventions; assisting Indonesia with further legal reforms; and providing more aid to the Indonesian education system to end the indoctrination and radicalisation in schools that are associated with terrorism.