

Islamic Radicalization and Jihadist Terrorist Activity in the South Pacific: Jemaah Islamiya

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Abstract

In recent years, US policy makers have had a preoccupation with terrorism in the Middle East, with national rhetoric often focusing on groups such as Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban. However, Jemmah Islamiya (JI) a radical Islamic terror organization based in Southeast Asia should be of primary concern. Jemmah Islamiya's primary mission is to establish an, "Islamic state encompassing Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the southern Philippines" ("National Counterterrorism Center", 2011). Perhaps most well-known for their 2003 attacks in Bali nightclubs, Jemmah Islamiya is part of the Al-Qaeda network and present a direct threat to US interests at home and abroad. This paper examines the financial link between Jemmah Islamiya and Al-Qaeda and explores the policy options for combating JI's operations. Given the shift in United States foreign policy to pivot towards Asia, security scholars and policy makers alike should be cognizant of the Al-Qaeda affiliates of the region.

Key Words: Jemmah Islamiya, Southeast Asia, Al-Qaeda, Pivot to Asia, Terrorism, Radical Islam, Terrorism Funding, Separatist Movements, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI)

Jemaah Islamiya:

The United States Defense Intelligence Agency has identified the rising Islamic insurgency in the southern providences of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines as a vital national security threat to the United States interests. The terrorist network in question is complex as many of the subsidiaries within the group adhere to varying ideologies. However, despite varying ideological aspirations much of the terror activity can be traced back to the Islamic group, Jemaah Islamiya (JI). According to the National Counterterrorism Center, Jemaah Islamiya is a clandestine Islamic terror organization based out of Indonesia whose primary goal is to establish an "Islamic state encompassing southern Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the southern Philippines" ("National Counterterrorism Center", 2011).

JI and similar terror organizations pose a grave threat to both national security at home and national interests abroad. Links have been made between Jemaah Islamiya and its subsidiary terror organizations and Al-Qaeda. Prior to the rise of JI, Southeast Asia was one of Al-Qaeda's primary headquarters providing funding and logistical support for various operations (Abuza, 2003). This regional legacy has led to some overlap in membership amongst the rank and file of the JI however, "Jemaah Islamiya has its own

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agenda and is not subordinate to Al-Qaeda” (Abuza, 2003). Traditionally, JI has worked as a money laundering organization for Al-Qaeda, but in more recent years JI has established its own Islamic agenda outside the purview of Al-Qaeda. However, similarities between Jemaah Islamiya and Al-Qaeda missions persist, with both citing intentions of waging jihad on infidels who do not abide by Sharia law.

History of Jemaah Islamiya

Ji was founded in 1994 by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abdullah Sungkar, two Indonesian clerics (Abuza, 2003). Their principles included a radical interpretation of Islam and active recruitment for mercenaries to join the global jihad. Essentially both men were working to establish Al-Qaeda cells in South East Asia. Despite the ideological commonality of JI and Al-Qaeda, analysts debate the extent to which they are linked. Some analysts assert that JI is a regional terror organization with regional goals of jihad while others believe that JI may be a regional subsidiary in the Al-Qaeda network (Williams M. G, 2003).

The monetary links between JI and Al-Qaeda clearly outline a network relationship between the two organizations. Many of the key leaders of JI, including Hambali (a second tier leader under the founders of the organization), are also members of Al-Qaeda. There are also recorded dispatchments of Al-Qaeda operatives to JI camps for training and oversight of terror activities. Evidence has also surfaced that JI and Al-Qaeda worked together at various meetings where the attack on the USS Cole and the Bali bombings were discussed (The White Papers, 2003).

Structure of Jemaah Islamiya

Jemaah Islamiya is believed to have approximately 500 to 1,000 members although exact numbers have not been established by any reliable sources (Abuza, 2003). The structure of the organization is rather rigid with Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir acting as “spiritual leaders” or amirs (Abuza, 2003). Both amirs serve as the overarching leaders of the group and directly lead the shura or the advisory council. The shura is split into 5 sub-shuras each with a respective leader and operational objective (Abuza, 2003).

The task of the first shura is to manage day to day operations including the training of members in tactical combat and explosives. Operatives are often sent to Al-Qaeda type training camps in regions such as Afghanistan. Although it is highly plausible that training may occur at other locations such as Pakistan and Northern Africa (Abuza, 2003). The second shura is focused on communications, and primarily maintains the webpage for the group (Abuza, 2003). The issue of network security is left to the third shura, which focuses on the intelligence/counter-intelligence operations of JI. Additionally, the third shura maintains diligent oversight on JI operations, ensuring strict discipline is maintained within the rank of file of the organization (Abuza, 2003). The financial wellbeing of JI is maintained by the fourth shura which establishes fundraising charities, bank accounts, and front companies to fund both the JI and Al-Qaeda (Abuza, 2003). The missionary component of JI (dakwah), is tasked to the fifth shura, which sets out to recruit potential jihadist members (Abuza, 2003). In order to recruit such members

the group establishes various “madrassas”, informal institutions of higher learning where students study the Qur’an and Hadith in great detail and often with extreme interpretations to the likes of Wahhabism. Islamic terror organizations tend to recruit a bulk of their membership from these madrassas as many students are already exposed to extremist logic and are willing to participate in the jihadist movement.

While governments of developed nation-states must be careful not to further alienate minority or majority Muslim populations perhaps a better system of oversight should be established. It is well known that madrassas are often breeding grounds for terrorist activity recruitment. As is the case in Southern Thailand, one of the formal complaints of the Muslim population in the Southern region is the lack of government sponsored religious higher education (Abuza, 2009). Perhaps by providing some type of religious schooling the government could keep oversight and limit the amount of radicalization occurring in these schools.

The JI structure is not only split up based off of operational objectives but it also has various regional commands throughout Southeast Asia. These regional commands are known as Mantiqis: (1) Malaysia, Singapore, and southern Thailand; (2) Indonesia; (3) The Philippines, eastern Malaysia, and the smaller islands of Indonesia; and (4) Australia and Papua (Abuza,2003). Each regional hub has a different function for the JI group. This type of structure makes it relatively difficult for the United States and its allies to effectively track the activities of JI members. Further adding to the complexity of the network, many of the Mantiqis have connections to regional Islamic separatist movements. For example, Mantiqi 1 has established ties with *Kumpulan Majahidin Mayalsia (KMM)* (Abuza, 2003). KMM actively carries out terror activities in Malaysia and southern provinces of Thailand in the hopes of overthrowing the Malaysian government and establishing an Islamic state. In addition to links with various regional Islamic separatist movements Mantiqi 1 has established dozens of shell companies to launder money and help secure bomb making material (Abuza, 2003).

Mantiqi 2 on the other hand is the recruiting hub for JI with links to *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI)*, another regional group that can be identified as quasi-political (Abuza, 2003). The group’s members hail from across various Indonesian islands and share the goal of establishing an Islamic state in the region. Mantiqi 3 is the logistical hub for JI, responsible for acquiring needed explosive materials and armaments (Abuza,2003). It is also associated with the group *MILF* or the *Moro Islamic Liberation Front* based out of Mindanao (Abuza, 2003). Scholars such as See Seng Tan, have noted that the *MILF* movement is primarily a regional movement for Moro social justice in a predominately Catholic society (Tan, 2003). Unfortunately, as is often the case larger groups such as JI and Al-Qaeda take advantage of otherwise nationalist movements by offering large sums of monies in exchange for alliances. By offering local groups funding JI and Al-Qaeda are effectively able to further complicate their network and thus throw off efforts to hinder their activities. Mantiqi 4 is primarily a small recruiting area for exiles from Indonesia and is not very well developed (Abuza, 2003). Because of the intricate structure of the JI and the regionalization of each Mantiqi it is imperative that both US intelligence and Malay/Indonesia/Thai intelligence compartmentalizes and specializes in each Mantiqi and their specific regionally associated group. Focusing on JI

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as a whole seems less effective than providing special consideration to each part of the network separately. Also the intricate network system provides an extra layer of protection to higher up officials, by providing multiple levels of separation between the operative on the ground and commanding officers. The sophisticated nature of the regionally separated network coupled with the hierarchal structure of the organization is the primary reason why merely taking out the leadership of JI is an ineffective solution to the problem. Lower ranking members will inevitably rise through the ranks and establish a new band of leadership. Thus, outlining the network and infiltrating the network with human assets may be the best way to hinder the terror activities of JI.

Similar to other extremist groups, JI and its associates attempt to legitimize their terror activities by hiding behind legitimate political activism. The JI and MMI have supported legitimate radical Islamic parties in Indonesia such as the PKS (Prosperous Justice Party). The JI, MMI, and others do a lot of good for the communities in which they operate often providing monies for the poor, medicine for the sick, and educational opportunities for the disadvantaged. By providing these services the group effectively wins the hearts and minds of the public thus, many citizens choose to overlook the respective groups' extremist activities. This is an effective ploy as it inspires the masses to protect the group further complicating the attempts of government agencies and tasks forces to shut down operations. Striking a balance between accepting the views of all citizens in a public forum and limiting radicalization is a difficult distinction. In the case of the MMI group of Indonesia, they are a legitimate political group however they do have direct ties to the JI and thus distant ties to Al-Qaeda via the JI. For this reason the Indonesian government should closely monitor party monies flowing in and out of campaign funds.

Attacks Sponsored by JI Prior to September 11th, 2001

Scholars vary on when JI began their terror activities Zachary Abuza asserts that JI did not commit any recorded acts of terror prior to 2000, but rather spent the time between 1994 and 2000 building up their intricate network. During this time they established a host of foreign contacts, recruitment networks, and training centers (Abuza, 2003). The first act of terror perpetrated by JI was the attempted assassination of the president of the Philippines in August, 2000 (Abuza, 2003). However Bilveer Singh, a well-known security academic at the National University of Singapore (NUS), has noted that JI was responsible for a 1994 airline bombing in the Philippines as well as a plan to assassinate the Pope and President Clinton in Manila in 1995 (Singh, 2007). Regardless of when JI began their terror activities one should note the shift between terror activities prior to 9/11 and subsequently to 9/11.

Increased Proficiency Following September 11th, 2001

The JI increased their training and plotting following the successful Al-Qaeda led attacks of 9/11. Training ramped up and more valuable targets were selected for attack. December 2001, was the first time that Singaporean and Malay officials broke up a cell of the JI ("National Counterterrorism Center", 2011). Intelligence later revealed that the JI had selected targets such as western embassies sprinkled throughout Southeast Asia

and United States naval bases. This type of intelligence information and cooperation between nation states has proven vital in the efforts to subdue terrorist activities abroad. It is for this reason that the United States should work to eliminate not only intra-agency competition within our own bureaucracy but also work with foreign officials outside of our NATO alliances to prevent attacks (Ramakrishna, 2009). The cooperation needed in order to achieve such a partnership cannot be built over night and thus the United States should remain cognizant to the necessity of a relationship of trust when conducting business abroad.

Much like their Al-Qaeda partners the JI has orchestrated attacks against primarily ‘soft-targets’, or those targets with less security. Locations of primary concern include; government affiliated business offices with limited security staff abroad with either official government employees or known US contractors, symbols of US economic power (private US based companies), US schools abroad, and water/electrical supplies used abroad by primarily western travelers/business persons.

Vigilance is vital to stopping any terror attack, and the United States should formulate a system to educate those who work/live in ‘high-danger’ zones listed above as to what to look out for. The switch from hard targets to soft targets can be seen in the change of JI attack plans in 2002. The original plan orchestrated by JI leader Hambali was to attack United States naval vessels (“National Counterterrorism Center”, 2011). However, noting that the US military was on high alert following the 2001 terror attacks in NYC and Washington, DC, Hambali ordered that a suicide bomber attack a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia. Overall the casualties of the attack numbered 202, making it one of the worst tourist based attacks in Indonesian history. Other examples of attacking soft targets can be seen in the JI attacks of JW Marriot hotel in 2003 in which a car-bomb was the primary method of attack, the 2004 truck bombing of an Australian embassy, and 2005 car bombings in Jakarta Indonesia (“National Counterterrorism Center”, 2011).

Funding of Jemaah Islamiya

Jemaah Islamiya enjoys a diverse source of income for their operations. Al-Qaeda provides most monetary funding for the acts of terror committed by JI. Malay and Singaporean intelligence reports, that JI received approximately \$130,000 dollars’ worth of support from Al-Qaeda between 2006 and 2001 (Abuza, 2003). However, following the success of the 2002 Bali night club attack Al-Qaeda was so impressed with the tactical success of the JI operation that they sent \$100,000 for future attacks (Abuza, 2003). That is almost equivalent to the amount of money sent over the aforementioned, five year period. The increase in Al-Qaeda financial support could be attributed to either an increase in terror activities conducted by the JI or the increase in funds provided to the Al-Qaeda network following the successful attacks of 9/11, 2001. The JI however, does not rely solely on personal contributions and assistance from Al-Qaeda. In fact, outside of terror operations the funding for the Jemaah Islamiya is primarily funded through Islamic charities, shell companies, Hawala, gem smuggling, and extortion/kidnapping (Abuza, 2003).

While most Islamic charities are legitimate terror organizations have been known to place operatives in the leadership role of particular charities. From such a position of

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power operatives are fully capable of stealing money and diverting funds to terror activities. Some intelligence communities have estimated that approximately 20 percent of the funds collected by these charities are diverted to paramilitary activity (Abuza, 2003). For this reason there should be more oversight by each respective government on charities working within their borders. A system of accountability needs to be developed in order to ensure that those charities that are willing fully providing monetary funds to terror organizations be held accountable. A national registration system of names of people serving on various boards of charities should be developed to limit questionable activities by suspected individuals.

The second most common way to make money for the organization is through the establishment of shell companies. For instance, Thailand has served as a transit point for funds for Al-Qaeda and the JI, in 2002 Thai officials shut down three companies (Jallil Trading, Al Amanah Enterprise Co and Sidco Co.) all of which were acting as front companies for Al-Qaeda (Abuza, 2009). Not only do these shell companies provide a seemingly legitimate way to transfer monies but it also provides a cover for the purchasing of bomb making materials. As was the case in the Green Laboratory Medicine (GLM) shell company ran by JI/Al-Qaeda. JI had plans to purchase 21 tons of ammonium nitrate in order to produce bombs however their plans were foiled when the primary operative was arrested on his way back to Malaysia (Abuza, 2003). The governments of the affected nations should establish a way to vet all new companies especially those companies involved in 'high-risk' activities such a medical laboratories, construction companies, or other industries which have easy access to materials that can be used in bomb making efforts.

Hawala can be defined as an underground type of traditional banking system in Islamic countries. Under the system people use unofficial bankers to transfer money these bankers do not keep records of those people transferring money or receiving money nor do they record the amount of money transferred. It is for that reason that law enforcement and intelligence agencies have a difficult time keeping up on JI activities. Usually intelligence can follow the money to a bank and identify the person associated with the particular account. However, Hawala provides a level of anonymity. Legislation should be enacted in order to cut down on the occurrence of Hawala. The establishment of currency control measures would prevent the conversion of currencies within certain regions thus limiting the activity of Hawala bankers and customers.

The use of gold and jewelry as payment for operations is also a very common practice. Both gold and jewelry in the form of precious stones and metals are almost untraceable, possess a high level of liquidity, and hold their value and therefore are often preferred to other modes of currency. The best way to combat the illegal trade of gold and other precious metals/gems for terrorist activities is to implement a policy limiting the amount of gold/jewelry that can be imported or exported from a region. This would include increased inspections of all modes of transportation in and out of a region not just flights, as it would be quiet easy to transport money out of the country via boat or some other less regulated form of transit., That is why a policy of reporting gold trades should be heavily enforced both in the public and private sectors. Traders should also be subject to random inspections by appropriate agencies.

Finally, Jemaah Islamiya receives funds through international crime including but not limited to theft, drug production, kidnapping, and extortion (Abuza, 2003). The only way to really combat this type of behavior is to place harsher penalties on those committing the crimes. Perhaps a system of checking the background and affiliations of those engaged in petty crimes would help identify suspected terrorists. However, very few policies would deter a suspected terrorist from engaging in the activity. As anyone who is willing to wage jihad more than likely could care less about a jail sentence for theft or kidnapping.

The most effective method to combat all of these funding tactics is greater cooperation between individual nation states. Many southeast nations have relatively porous maritime borders one of the first steps in combating the illegal export/import of gold and other substances would be strengthening the security of the surrounding waters. With greater cooperation between local navies and increased cooperative training with US forces the regional militaries can increase maritime patrols. Suspicious transactions should be noted and shared with allied nations. There should also be greater involvement by the UN to stop money laundering and illegal smuggling of gold/gems into these nations. There should also be a greater effort by majority Islamic countries to oversee and regulate Islamic charities and greater cooperation to shut down known financiers of terrorist activities.

Future Projection

Southeast Asian governments have been working diligently to capture those affiliated with JI and have successfully apprehended approximately 300 suspected terrorists since 2003 (“National Counter Terrorism Center”, 2011). In 2008, two senior JI operatives were arrested, in 2010 law enforcement successfully raided an extremist training camp, and in 2011 the head operative in charge of the 2002 Bali bombings was arrested (“National Counter Terrorism Center”, 2011).

While the JI may seem like it is crumbling from the inside out its ties to Al-Qaeda and the regions ethnic and religious volatility are reason for ongoing concern. Removing head operatives does not mean that junior leadership will not have the opportunity or the desire to reorganize, either as a form of the JI network or splinter organizations. Such is especially true, following the killing of Osama Bin Laden in 2011 and the recent unfortunate missteps of the United States military in Afghanistan.

JI has their own objectives of promoting Islamic rule in Southeast Asia but they would not miss the refrain from carrying out attacks on Western and American targets if given the opportunity. For this reason, it is imperative for US soft targets to stay on alert in the region and for the US government to continue to supply intelligence surveillance. Increased cooperation between the governments in SEATO and ASEAN would also help with the regulation of trade and thus help limit the money flowing to various terror organizations.

Beyond increasing security, one must note that radicalism is not the same as terrorism. People turn to radicalization because all other means of political dialogue have been exhausted. Thus, if the United States and other nations are fully committed to

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decreasing radicalization we must look at the factors that influence people to radicalize. Ethnic and religious minorities are more likely to become radical than those included in the majority thus, governments must take extra precautions to ensure that there is a power-sharing system in place at the federal/highest level of government (Ramakrishna, 2009). Groups also radicalized more often when there is not a viable democracy. Thus the United States should focus on helping nations establish viable democracies with strong institutions. It has also been demonstrated that those lacking economic stability are more likely to become involved with terrorist activities. Perhaps the best plan to counteract terrorism abroad and at home is to provide a higher standard a living to at risk populations in an attempt to mitigate the likelihood of radicalization.

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