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Darul Islam: A Fertile Ground for Jemaah Islamiyah's Recruitment?

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JEMAAH Islamiyah (JI), the Southeast Asian regional terror group which has perpetrated most, if not all, of the major terrorist attacks in Indonesia, continues to recruit and regenerate despite crackdowns by the security agencies across the region. Despite being on the run, Azahari Husin and Noordin Mohd Top are still able to get new members into their ranks. The Malaysian duo, also JI members, are reportedly the masterminds of the Bali, JW Marriot and the Australian embassy bombings. Interestingly, JI's new recruits come from other Islamist groups in Indonesia, specifically the older but less visible Darul Islam (DI) from which some of the key leaders of JI originated. This phenomenon, which is not entirely new, has catapulted DI's profile recently, albeit in a negative way. Is JI exploiting the vast DI network for its own benefits?

The prominent founders of JI, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, were initiated into DI in 1976 by Hispran, short for Haji Ismail Pranoto. The JI duo continued to be members of DI until 1993, when Sungkar fell out with Ajengan Masduki, one of many DI leaders then. Upon Sungkar's split with DI, he roped in many DI members into JI and thus, the common reference to DI as JI's parent group. However, this was not the first time that an irreparable crack appeared in DI.

Genesis of Factions

Since the execution in 1962 of S.M. Kartosuwiryo, DI's founder, the group has been unable to maintain a cohesive organisation with a well-defined structure. The organisation is rife with individual factions, bickering over leadership claims and legitimacy tied to individual leaders. The numbers and size of DI factions are unknown even to DI members themselves. However, there are few ideological or operational differences among the factions; personality and power are the key fault lines.

It is all too common for a member, or members to face some irreconcilable differences with the leader, leading to the formation of break-away factions. Most importantly, power struggles stand at the centre of this fragmentation. A former DI member would even go as far to say that "DI has degenerated into a group of warlords". But such is the dynamic of DI that it is hard to keep track of every single faction that claims to continue their struggle for an Indonesian Islamic state in the name of DI.

This phenomenon is very important to understanding the milieu that JI is currently exploiting

for recruitment. The fragmentation of DI has made it easy for JI leaders such as Azahari and Noordin to infiltrate and recruit cadres for operational requirements. As some DI members claimed, it is the unstructured factions that are very susceptible to infiltration.

Broadly, DI factions may be categorised as structured and unstructured. Structured factions have a well-defined hierarchy and tight control from the top. There are standard operating procedures and rules and regulations prescribed for members of such factions. Members may even be dishonourably discharged for acting in opposition to, or without instruction of, their leaders. One structured DI faction claimed that they even disallow their members from confronting the enemy (Republic of Indonesia) as the situation is not ripe for any confrontation. A structured faction is exclusive in that members are often discouraged from mingling with the members of a different faction.

In the unstructured factions, there is neither clear leadership, nor coordination between members. In the absence of any control from the top, members are free to engage in any actions. Most importantly, they have the freedom to mingle with members of other groups such as JI. Such contacts present invaluable opportunities for JI to recruit new members.

JI Tapping into DI

Recruiting from the existing DI milieu is highly advantageous to JI. Indoctrination does not need to start from scratch. After all, JI was a splinter of DI. Members of DI want to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia and faction members may already have attended some form of military training during their association with DI. In the current situation of intense surveillance by Indonesia's intelligence bodies and security forces, recruiting from their parent group may somewhat help to camouflage the operations and alleviate the issue of trust.

The Bali and Australian embassy bombings can testify to this. Although DI's profile has become increasingly visible following the Australian embassy bombing, its members have in fact been implicated in the earlier Bali bombings. One of the suicide bombers in the Bali bombing (Sari Club suicide bomber), Arnasan alias Jimmy alias Acong alias Iqbal 1 (the suicide bomber who died in Paddy's club was known as Iqbal 2), was a former member of DI West Java, and was purportedly recruited by Imam Samudera. The suicide bomber in the Australian embassy bombing, Heri Golun, was also a member of DI West Java, and he was recruited by Rois, who is believed to be the right hand man of Noordin Mohd Top.

Although not all of its members are vulnerable to JI's recruitment drive, there will always be a small pool of disenchanted radical members that terrorist groups like JI can tap into. DI *per se* may not be dangerous, but it will continue to be a fertile ground for recruitment by other more radical, militant groups. Compounded by DI's history of successful and effective regeneration, this problem will not go away anytime soon.

Current status of DI

DI today is mostly dormant; most of its members are lying low and engaging in peaceful socialisation of Islam. DI does not share JI's expertise in bomb-making and many DI members would testify that they do not target Westerners. Non-Muslims are not their enemy; the Indonesian state ideology of Pancasila is - specifically the principle of the belief in the one and only God. They reject this principle because Allah is not mentioned as that one and only God. In addition, DI senior leaders are less keen on armed struggle. Most of them,

having been imprisoned before, are probably traumatised and would rather adopt a more peaceful approach.

Nevertheless, the role that DI plays in providing new recruits to JI should not be underestimated. There is a need to understand the current state of DI and the dynamics of its operations if JI is to be deprived of its source of recruitment and support base.

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