



# IDSS COMMENTARIES (32/2006)

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## **CHASING THE ELUSIVE MILITANT IN INDONESIA: The Wonosobo raid to capture Noordin M Top**

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ON 29 April, Indonesian security forces stormed a house in Wonosobo, Central Java after putting it under surveillance since 3 am. The police order on the inhabitants to surrender was met with gunfire. After an hour-long gunfight, the resistance ended with two suspects dead and one captured. There were no police fatalities.

The 29 April storming and capture was the latest in a string of raids against suspected safe houses of some of the most highly sought Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) suspects. In this case, Noordin Mohd. Top, the Malaysian terror suspect, and his squad were using the house in Binangun Village of the Kretek district as a hideout. Noordin, who has been on the run from the regional authorities, was able to elude capture by leaving the location just hours before the raid. Detachment 88, the special unit that conducted the raid, also carried out an arrest in nearby Tawangmangu.

The two killed were Jabir alias Mujabir alias Gempur Budi Angkoro and Abdul Hadi alias Bambang alias Bahruddin Saleh. Abdul Hadi was the more prominent of the two, allegedly a right-hand man of both Noordin and Dr Azahari Husin, the wanted JI bombmaker who died in an earlier police raid on 9 November 2005 in East Java. Abdul Hadi was also allegedly involved in the “Bali II” bombing as an instructor in the recording and production of the VCD of the suicide bombers.

Jabir allegedly was connected to the Australian Embassy bombing and the J.W. Marriot attack in 2003. He was a cousin of Fathurrahman Al Ghozi, the suspected JI member who was shot dead by the Philippines police in 2003. Jabir studied in Ngruki, which was founded by Abu Bakar Bashir, before moving to the Darusyahada school. in 1995. Jabir studied and later taught there until 1998. Darusyahada is an Islamic boarding school located in Boyolali, Solo, Central Java. It received a huge exodus of Ngruki students in 1995 following an internal conflict in Ngruki. Given that many of its teachers as well as students are Ngruki graduates, it should be no surprise that there is a Darusyahada alumni involved in JI activities.

Jabir is believed to be a recruiter, having allegedly recruited Salik Firdaus, one of the suspects of the “Bali II” bombing in 2005, and Ahmad Rofiq Ridho, Al Ghozi’s younger brother. Ahmad Rofiq is standing trial on several charges, including sheltering Noordin. Ahmad Rofiq admitted that he had helped Noordin on the request of Jabir.

Both Jabir and Abdul Hadi had allegedly attended a one-month bomb-making course by Dr Azahari before the latter's death. Clearly both men, Jabir and Abdul Hadi, are key players in the reconstituted JI.

The two other individuals arrested in the separate raids were Sholahuddin alias Supri and Muhtafirin. Supri was allegedly involved in the Atrium and Christmas bombings in 2000. Two of his brothers, Farihin bin Ahmad and Abdul Jabar, participated in the attack on the Philippine ambassador's Jakarta residence in 2000. Muhtafirin was allegedly a courier during Noordin's time on the run.

### **Terrorism in Indonesia: the immediate threat**

The personal connections uncovered by the raid show that despite its fractured network, JI can still recruit and train operatives. As long as Noordin remains at large, his splinter group, Tanzim Qaidatul Jihad, remains a serious threat to Indonesian security.

Nonetheless, the raid confirms what has long been suspected -- that JI is now highly fractured and Tanzim Qaidatul Jihad is its violent and notorious offshoot. It also strengthens the understanding that these networks are increasingly based on the close and longstanding personal relationships of the militants through either kin or alumni ties. The cell or cells gather a reputation based on their operations, which allows them to recruit from that tight pool. The new structure allows for greater security, and more operational independence. There is little need for a central leadership, and no authority sought to sanction a particular operation. This means that the arrest of a "leader", even one as valuable as Noordin Mohd. Top, may do limited damage to the network.

All this notwithstanding, the raids are critically important. The arrest or death of a prominent militant figure would deal a severe blow to the morale of his network, not to mention the loss of his operational skills. Clearly the security services have very good intelligence on the existing infrastructure. Even if they did not know the exact occupants of the safe house, the police knew that it was a safe house. This may force Noordin to increase his personal security, further isolating him from the financial and martial support that are already in short supply. The discovery and seizure of active bombs indicates that an operation, perhaps several, were disrupted. This, in and of itself, is an important victory.

So, despite the near miss on Noordin Mohd. Top, the police can claim the psychological upperhand. This will undoubtedly raise their morale. The Indonesian security services are closing in. Noordin Mohd. Top's days are numbered.

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