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LEGACY OF THE BALI TRIO: A Changing Threat Pattern from Jemaah Islamiyah

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The trio responsible for Bali Bombing I have been executed. The Indonesian authorities have received threats to expect retaliation for the executions. Will the threats materialize? What are legacies of the three bombers for the Indonesian radical community?

THE BALI bombers trio – Imam Samudra (38), Ali Ghufron alias Mukhlas (48), and Amrozi (47) – were finally executed by an Indonesian firing squad on Sunday, 9 November 2008 at 00.15 am. The three were sentenced to death by the Denpasar District Court in 2003 for their roles in Bali Bombing I in October 2002 that killed 202 people. They had exhausted their appeals against the death penalty. Their final effort was to ask for a judicial review on the method of the execution by the firing squad, which they considered un-Islamic and torturous. This request was rejected by the Constitutional Court on 21 October 2008. Interestingly, the trio did not ask for a presidential clemency; even if they had it would have been rejected. They trio remained stubbornly anti-government until the very end.

Run-up to the executions

The bombers did not meet their fate quietly. For the past several months they had been urging their followers to avenge their deaths. They specifically called for the deaths of those involved in the execution decision including the Indonesian President and Vice President, Minister of Justice, attorneys general, prosecutors and others. The threat was posted on a jihadi website, though the bombers' lawyer denied the three had written such statements. Messages to retaliate did not only occur in the cyber world; hand-written posters calling for retaliation were also found in East Java.

In a sign of support students from the Al-Islam Pesantren in Lamongan – the home town of the bombers – sold t-shirts for Rp 20,000 (around US\$2) that said “Although Amrozi and friends were executed, jihad will continue”. In the days both pre- and post-execution, Indonesian police received threats that there would be bombings in Australia as well as attacks on US embassies and shopping malls. So far, the police have detained two persons for sending SMSes threatening retaliatory attacks..

The critical question remains: Can the calls for revenge be realized? Heightened security will reduce

the threat in the short to medium term. Over the longer term, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)'s operational capacity appears to have deteriorated to the point where it is not capable of retaliating in a significant fashion. So while their followers may be incapable of answering the calls for revenge, do the Bali Three have an ability after their deaths to impact the wider movement beyond the immediate future?

The Legacy of the Three Bombers

The short answer is yes. The radical community has finally gained their martyrs. The prolonged legal process permitted the most intelligent of the guilty, Imam Samudra -- mastermind of the Bali attack -- to write two books including: *Aku Melawan Teroris* (I Fight the Terrorists), published by Jazera, a JI-linked publisher, in 2004 and became a best seller, with more than 12,000 copies sold. In March 2008, eight months before his death, he published *Satu Jihad Sejuta Vonis: Mengungkap Al Haq Menghalau Al-Batil* (One Jihad One Million Verdicts: Revealing the Truth and Banishing The Wrong), published by Ar-Rahmah Media, a publishing company owned by Muhammad Jibril. He is a former member of JI's Ghuraba cell in Pakistan and the son of Abu Jibril, deputy emir of the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI).

Not to be outdone, it is also reported that while in prison, Mukhlas worked on his autobiography titled "*Jihad Bom Bali: Sebuah Pembelaan*" (Bali Bombing Jihad: A Defence). There is however no report that the book has been published. Mukhlas also inherited a nine-minute video recording entitled "*Messages to the Mujahidin Leaders*" which appeared at Al-Ekhlaas, an international jihad forum. According to the website, it was based on Mukhlas' interview with Al-Jazeera although Al-Jazeera did not in the end go on air with the segment.

Finally, Abu Bakar Bashir's spokesman Fauzan Al Anshary revealed that Amrozi's biography will be published soon. These and the numerous open letters and other comments leave a large written legacy to feed the radical movement for sometime to come. Thus even though the three are dead, their ideas live on, and can serve to inspire JI and other extremists to launch attacks, and perhaps replenish the wider movement.

Changing Threat Pattern of JI

Following the execution, there is a critical question: Will JI's target selection change? There are already indications of that possibility, both from the rhetoric, and the recent plot disrupted in Jakarta, targeting the city's largest oil facility. It seems that JI has shifted, or expanded, its targeting from exclusively foreign targets to include a large local constituency. JI has not abandoned its traditional targets -- tourist places, shopping malls, foreign businesses, embassies, churches and others. But added to them now seems to be the Indonesian government.

JI began changing its tactics in 2007, partially as a result of the tighter security environment, and partially to be seen as acting. They moved from grand attacks to striking individuals, such as the intended killing of the dean of a Christian university in Central Java, initiated by JI's main leader, Zarkasih. In addition, there were other attempts such as the successful murder of a Christian schoolteacher and a plan to murder an American school teacher by a JI-Palembang cell.

The focus on 'soft targets' makes action easier for JI as there are too many potential targets for the security authorities to protect.. This is not to rule out attacks on more traditional targets, such as the plot against Jakarta's Plumpang oil depot, the largest oil fuel storage in Indonesia. Had it been disrupted, the economic impact on the Indonesian economy and Indonesian people would be severe. This demonstrates that JI continues to have the desire to disrupt the national economy and its supporting infrastructure, making JI, and its splinters, very dangerous.

While the targets are changing, JI's capabilities are improving as well. Rusli Mardani's arrest in

connection with the oil depot plot, also revealed that Azahari Hussin – JI's bomb-making expert who died in a police raid in 2005 -- had successfully transferred his knowledge to his subordinates. Besides the explosive materials found in Rusli's house, the bomb circuits are reported to be the most advanced seen in JI's arsenal. JI's notorious bomb makers, such as Azahari, seem to have been able to transfer their knowledge and spreading the threat.

The Future of Radicalism in Indonesia

Although the trio have been executed, their ideological legacy, disseminated through their writings, interviews and the radical internet, permits their ideals to live on. Their perceived martyrhood is enhanced by the large number of people -- nine percent out of 200 million Muslim in Indonesia according to one 2006 poll --- who felt that the Bali Bombings were justified. These individuals and groups such as MMI, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Bashir's new organisation, Jamaat Ansorut Tauhid (JAT), still believe that the government has not revealed the real mastermind of the Bali Bombings, whom they allege were not the trio.

The ability of these and other radical ideas to flourish in Indonesia highlights the wider problem of the unchallenged ideas that inspired the tragic bombings in the first place. The execution may have brought a sense of justice, but the trio's death may not bring peace.

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