

JEMAAH ISLAMIYA: A MULTINATIONAL AND VERY HIGHLY-STRUCTURED ORGANISATION

In brief:

- **Saturday evening's attacks in Bali show that the international jihad movement is more able than ever to hit at several places within a very short space of time.**
- **Within that movement, Jemaah Islamiya (JI) of South-East Asia, although less mediatised than other organisations, is particularly active, acting with "professionalism" in planning operations in the long term and demonstrating effective execution.**
- **JI can count on the broad sympathy of local people, fostered in part by a prevalent anti-American sentiment.**
- **The Hindu population of Bali is a particular target for JI Islamists.**
- **Regional security services seem unable to act alone against this threat.**
- **Errors have been committed, without which the gravity of the attacks might have been reduced.**

1) THE FACTS

Two and a half months after the 7 July attacks in London, two months after those at Sharm el-Sheikh, and nearly three years after the Bali massacre that killed 202 and injured hundreds, Islamist terrorism moved once more to Asia, and specifically to Indonesia.

Early on Saturday evening, at about 20.00 local time, a number of bombs – the precise number is unknown; the authorities speak of two explosions, but media witnesses have talked of four or five bombs – exploded in **Jimbaran** and **Kuta**, two of Bali's most popular resorts. In Jimbaran, two explosions took place at the edge of a beach frequented by surfers, seemingly in seafood restaurants. About 30 km away and half an hour later in Kuta, a main street filled with restaurants, bars and shops open in the evening was the target of a bomb apparently placed on the first floor of a restaurant. **Here, there was a clear error on the part of security services. With two explosions taking place in restaurants, the terrorist origin of the incidents was undeniable. The police should therefore have ordered the immediate evacuation of public areas in the vicinity. The half-hour between the two attacks would have allowed for such an evacuation. The decision not to evacuate is all the more culpable**

in that the authorities were expecting some kind of attack. Indonesian intelligence services were warned months ago by their American and Australian counterparts of an increased risk of attack between the end of the summer and the start of Ramadan.

At such a peak hour, the bars and restaurants were crowded. On Sunday morning around 02.00 (20.00 on Saturday evening European time) the official toll stood at 32 dead and 101 injured, with the number of fatalities likely to increase in the hours and days to follow.

Compared to the attacks of October 2002, the number of casualties is bound to be a disappointment to terrorists who clearly seek to cause as many victims as possible. The reason is probably that the bombs detonated were of "medium power". Pictures shown very shortly afterwards by Indonesian television seem to support such a hypothesis: **amid the debris of the explosions (many of those injured were hit by flying glass and metal debris) more solid structures seemed to have suffered little or no damage.**

For Bali, which had had trouble coming back from the 2002 attacks but which was helped by the fact that its beaches were among the few in the region not to be affected by the tsunami of December 2004, this new tragedy will have dramatic economic consequences: tourism is still the principal economic activity of the island. Clearly, there is a desire on the part of the Islamists to "punish" a Hindu population which is standing in the way of their hegemonistic ambitions (*see below*).

As far as world opinion is concerned, these new acts of violence are a reminder that the Al Qaeda style terrorism is alive and well. And that with its global reach, and the existence of local and regional organisations and autonomous networks, **the international Islamist movement is capable of planning and carrying out major offensives thousands of kilometres apart and separated by shorter and shorter periods of time** (three attacks in Great Britain, Egypt and Indonesia in the space of barely 80 days).

2) THE MARK OF JEMAAH ISLAMIYA AND OF AL QAEDA

Responsibility for the attacks has not yet been claimed, but they carry the mark of the international jihadist movement and in particular its Oriental branch – Jemaah Islamiya (JI). Some signs have already been found in Bali that recall the attacks in London and Egypt, as well as numerous other attacks since September 2001:

- **Multiple targeting: several devices exploded at different locations only minutes apart;**
- **Soft targets, in other words those that were difficult or impossible to protect (public transport, leisure sites) as opposed to embassies, government buildings or other official installations;**
- **The place, time and day chosen – a tourist spot, at the beginning of a Saturday evening – shows a desire to hit a maximum number of civilians and cause as many casualties as possible.**

3) JEMAAH ISLAMIYA: A STRUCTURED AND EFFECTIVE ORGANISATION

For the Indonesian authorities, these new attacks prove that in spite of arrests and trials – which led to about 30 convictions including three death sentences – which followed the massacre of October 2002, Jemaah Islamiya remains as dangerous as ever. Many of the network members responsible for the Bali attack were never arrested (or even in some cases identified) and **at least two of the JI's weapons experts are still at large: the Malaysians Noordin Mohammed Top and Azahari Husin.**

Aside from the Bali attacks, the JI carried out two other major attacks in recent years:

- **On 5 August 2003, a car bomb killed 12 people at the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta.**
- **On 9 September 2004 the Australian embassy was attacked. Again 12 people lost their lives.**

Because of its spread – it has sympathisers in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines as well as in Brunei and Singapore – the JI is certainly one of the most difficult terrorist organisations to combat.

Although it has been active for years, the JI is little known, and has never been penetrated to a level sufficient to allow dismantling or even arrests that would reduce its activities. **The arrest of Abu Bakar Bashir, an Indonesian cleric considered to be the spiritual leader of the JI, as well as the arrest of Riduan bin Isomoddin (alias Hambali), the legendary military chief of the JI, had no lasting disabling effect on the organisation, showing how well structured it is.** It is likely that the organisation has a "professional" leadership based on autonomous networks and cells.

Certain attacks planned by the organisation were nevertheless prevented in recent years, among them:

- Attacks on American, Israeli, Australian and British diplomatic targets in Singapore in December 2001;
- Attacks, also in Singapore, on American warships and crews;
- Planned attacks in June 2003 in Thailand on western Embassies and tourist locations.

The aims of the JI are known: it wants to establish a Caliphate (Islamic state) over a vast area comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, south Philippines and south Thailand, as a means of unifying the Muslims of South-East Asia.

The strength of the forces of the organisation, on the other hand, remains a matter for speculation. Various sources credit it with between a few hundred and a few thousand members. **Our own experts estimate the JI can count on 1,000 to 2,000 permanent members spread throughout hundreds of cells.** This "hard core" is surrounded by a second circle of several thousand active sympathisers, which in turn is supported by a third circle of passive sympathisers running into the tens of thousands. The size of this pool of passive

sympathisers is partly explained by the generalised anti-American sentiment in Indonesia and Malaysia (for instance, many mass demonstrations were held in October 2001 against international intervention in Afghanistan).

Various indications picked up in recent years in the course of investigations in different Asian countries allow us to suppose that the JI has close links with other sister organisations like the **Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia** (KMM) which happens also to have been founded by Sheikh **Bashir** and **Hambali**. Other links have been uncovered with **Laskar Jihad** of Indonesia and the **Abu Sayaf Group** of the Philippines. It has also been proved that dozens of JI members arrested after the 2002 Bali attacks were trained in the Philippines.

Since the beginning of the decade the JI has moved closer to Al Qaeda, and one of Hambali's lieutenants, **Yazid Sufaat**, even met with some of the planners of the 9 September 2001 attacks (some of whom lived in the Philippines in the late 1990s, planning attacks that were never carried out). Members of the JI were also trained in Afghanistan prior to October 2001, while Al Qaeda financed certain of the organisation's activities, to the tune of \$140-150,000¹.

This financing might seem derisory, but it should be remembered that terrorism, despite what is often claimed, is not an expensive business. In addition, the JI can count on other financing from the Middle East and especially on collections organised in certain sympathetic mosques and associations in Asia. It also receives funding from members and sympathisers who have businesses in South-East Asia.

4) THE LOCAL SECURITY SERVICES WERE RELATIVELY POWERLESS

These few elements lead us to believe that Jemaah Islamiya is certainly one of the most well-structured and most dangerous organisations in the orbit of Al Qaeda – even if it is less mediatised as a result of the fact that most of its attacks are "low noise" in that they do not affect Westerners. Organised around a long-term strategic regional objective, it comprises a dense tissue of networks, cells and well-financed sympathisers, well-trained and relying on the passive tolerance of a large section of the population.

Faced with this threat, it is clear that local security forces, with the sole exception of Singapore's, are often of little effectiveness and riddled with corruption, and are quite unable to meet the challenge of this international Hydra that is the JI. **Popular opinion already referred to makes it highly unlikely the US will be able to insert Special Forces or military. Australia or Great Britain, on the other hand, could perhaps step into the breach.**

However that would require the Indonesian and Malaysian authorities to swallow their pride and accommodate such assistance which, if it is to be of any effectiveness, will have to be massive.

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¹ See remarks by FBI director Robert Mueller, reported by the Reuters agency, on 18 March 2002: "FBI alerts allies on Al Qaeda nuclear plans".

