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Terrorism in Indonesia: The Emergence of West Javanese Terrorists

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Terrorism in Indonesia: The Emergence of West Javanese Terrorists

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Abstract

Since the end of the New Order government, terrorism has become the most serious issue in Indonesia. Several bomb explosions since the fall of New Order government in 1998 until the Bali bomb in October 2005 demonstrated that terrorism is a continuous threat. Media reports of previous terrorist attacks suggested that some of the terrorists are from West Java. This research aims to analyze contributing factors to the emergence of terrorism in this province. To examine the correlation between poverty and terrorism, field research was conducted in the southern parts of West Java, the region that is considered less advantageous than the northern parts. Because poverty is strongly correlated with development policy, the research focuses on the government's development program and socio-economic issues. Moreover, terrorism and radicalism to some extent are caused by misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Islamic teachings. To see the causal, the research was also conducted in the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*), as well as to examine the role of *Kyai* as informal leaders in the rural area.

Key words: terrorism, terrorists, poverty, development program, the role of formal and informal leaders.

1. Introduction

After the terrorist attack in Bali in November 2002, the Indonesian government has been paying more serious attention to the issue of terrorism prevention policy. Terrorist bomb blasts are considered as “new” phenomena in Indonesian politics. During Soeharto's authoritarian regime, especially in the mid 1970's until the end of New Order era, terrorism was not a common form to express political grievance. After the end of Soeharto's regime in May 1998, followed by the so-called “reformasi” era, Indonesia entered a transitional period to becoming the biggest democratic country in the Muslim World. The reform era was underlined by the election of

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Muhammad Yusuf Kalla as President and Vice President elected under the first free and direct general election held in Indonesia since 1955.

Transformation into a democratic country, however, was followed by various security problems. Terrorists' actions and bomb blasts in several cities, together with other forms of social unrest and violent demonstrations occurred throughout the archipelago. The Indonesian public was especially shocked by 13 bombs that exploded almost simultaneously in several cities in Indonesia on Christmas Eve, 25 December 2000. In the following year (2001), 81 bombs exploded, 29 explosions happened in Jakarta. The most significant one in terms of number of victims and international coverage was the first Bali bomb blast on 12 Oct 2002. The tragedy was repeated in the following year when a suicide bomber exploded the lobby of the J.W Marriott hotel in Jakarta in August 2003, in front of the Australian Embassy in 2004, and the second Bali bomb on 1 October 2005.

The Indonesian police as quoted by several media reports have identified Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) as the terrorists' masterminds and perpetrators. Even though Dr. Azahari, a Malaysian national and the master mind of several bomb blasts in Indonesia was killed by the Indonesian police in 2005, JI is still considered to be the most dangerous terrorist organization.¹ Some analysts believe that JI is still actively recruiting suicide bombers, with the birth of the "new terrorist generation" to operate their next targets.²

After the terrorist attack in Bali in 2002, the Indonesian police captured 4 terrorists, namely Amrozy, Imam Samudra alias Abdul Aziz, and Muklas alias Ali Gufron. A report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) connects Indonesian terrorists with Al-Qaeda through the JI networks. According to the intelligent data from Singapore and Malaysia, Al-Qaeda emerged in Southeast Asia through the Al-Jamaah Al-Islamiyah under the leadership of Indonesian nationals Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Baasyir.

¹ Teroris Baru, Jaringan Lama, *Tempo* newsmagazine, Edition 17-23 October 2005.

² Sydney Jones, Sayap garis keras itu bernama "Thoifah Muqatilah" (The name of the hardliner is "Thoifah Muqatilah"), interview with *Tempo* newsmagazine, *Tempo*, edition 17-23 October 2005, pp. 60-63.

Terrorist operations required a complicated organizational structure; individual as well as group network and a complicated cell network. As identified by the Indonesian police, at least 9 groups had been involved in that single operation. The first three are the Serang group (13 members), the Abdul Rauf group (4 members), and the Sukoharjo group (2 members), all involved in preparation, providing safe havens, funding, and survey. The Lamongan group (11 members) and Bali group (4 members) were directly involved on the operation. Last but not least was the presence of Solo group (9 members) that was responsible for “post operation”, and finding a safe haven for the bomb operators. In addition, the Riau and Manado groups were indirectly involved. The system demonstrated that because the terrorists’ actions needed human resources support, the recruitment continued to take place. The suicide bombers illustrated Al-Qaeda and Jamaah Islamiyah’s stealth and resourcefulness in mobilizing people (operatives and informers) for maximizing collateral damage. However, the modern-day terrorist favors indiscriminate, mass killings, and extols committing suicide.³

Terrorists activities are possible because of the support of conducive factors, e.g. social-economic disparity, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, poverty, pressure from the globalization process, and ineffectiveness of public management policies which the terrorists used as safe haven.⁴ As an unconventional war, terrorist action requires circumstances and principles of warfare. As stated by the JI activists, the end purpose is to strike a blow against the existing regime, and this is possible if other factors, such as the social system, are dysfunctioning.

2. Theoretical Framework

In previous public debates, participants have claimed that poverty generates terrorism. The notion is hardly surprising and consistent with the results of most of the existing literature on the economics of conflicts. Alesina et al suggest that poor economic condition increase the probability of political coups.⁵ Collier and Hoeffler show that economic variables are powerful

³ Saniotis, Arthur, Re-Enchanting Terrorism: Jihadists as “Liminal Beings”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

⁴ Rusdi Marpaung and Al Araf (ed), 2003, *Terorisme, Definisi, Aksi dan Regulasi*, Jakarta, Koalisi untuk Keselamatan Rakyat, p. 25.

⁵ Alesina, Ozler, Roubini, and Swagel, 1996, *Political Instability and Economic Growth*, *Journal of Economic Growth*, Vol. I, pp. 189-211.

predictors of civil war, while political variables have low explanatory power.⁶ Miguel, Satyanath and Sergenti show that in African countries, negative exogenous shocks in economic growth increase the likelihood of civil conflict.⁷ Because terrorism is a manifestation of political conflict, these results seem to indicate that poverty and adverse economic conditions may play an important role in explaining terrorism.

However, recent empirical studies have challenged the above view. Krueger, Latini and Piazza find no evidence to support the suggestion that poverty may generate terrorism. In particular, the results in Krueger and Laitin suggest that among countries with similar levels of civil liberties, poor countries do not generate more terrorism than rich countries.⁸ Conversely, among countries with similar levels of civil liberties, richer countries seem to be preferred targets for transnational terrorists attacks. Alberto Abadie further challenged previous notions with the statement that terrorist risk is not significantly higher for poorer countries, once the effects of other country-specific characteristics such as the level of political freedom are taken into account. In particular Abadie challenged Collier and Hoeffler civil war and poverty theory by stating that lack of political freedom is shown to explain terrorism. Countries with intermediate levels of political freedom are shown to be more prone to terrorism than countries with high levels of political freedom or countries with highly authoritarian regimes.⁹ Abadie researched countries like Iraq, Spain and Russia, and concludes that countries that underwent transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy may be accompanied by temporary increases in terrorism. Motivated by the above argument and counterargument that poverty generates terrorism, this research will analyze the connection between the two in the context of the terrorists from West Java.¹⁰

⁶ Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, Greed and Grievance in Civil War, Oxford Economic Paper, Vol. 56, pp. 563-595.

⁷ Miguel, Satyanath and Sergenti, 2004, Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach, *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 112 (4), pp. 725-753.

⁸ Krueger, A.B and D.D Laitin, 2003, "Kto Kogo? : A Cross-Country Study of the Origins and Targets of Terrorism, mimeo, November 2003.

⁹ Alberto Abadie, op.cit. p. 3.

¹⁰ West Javanese is also referred to Sundanese. Sunda is part of West Java but not vice versa, because West Java is also consists of Cirebonese and Bantenese (before 2000).

3. Research Question, Aim and location

This research aims to answer the research questions: “to what extent does poverty led to terrorism?” and, “what are other factors that contribute to terrorism?” The purpose of this research is to explore and identify factors that contributive to terrorism in specific West Java province. The end result is hopefully contributive to the national, provincial, and district level of government to construct development policies in the researched areas.

To approach the above purposes, interviews were conducted with a population from different backgrounds: youths, formal leaders (village level government leaders), informal leaders (*kyai*, *uelemas*, and other religious organizations), especially those strongly opposed to the government. The local population consisted of santris (pupils of Islamic schools), the government apparatuses in the village level, and security personnel. Research was conducted through observation, interviews, focus group discussion, and participatory research.

Research locations were chosen from areas with special characteristics: undeveloped, historically the basis of the rebel movement, strong Islamic Wahabian culture, and areas known as terrorists’ safe havens and breeding places. To examine the correlation between poverty and terrorism, the first category consists of the southern parts of West Java that are considered less developed compared to the northern parts.¹¹ The areas are also remote, isolated, having poor infrastructure and public facilities, as well poor road access to major cities. Geographic consideration is necessary to support or to challenge Abadie’s previous research and concluding statement that certain geographic characteristics may favor terrorist activities.¹² As suggested by Abadie, failure to eradicate terrorism in some areas of the world has often been attributed to geographic barriers, like mountainous terrain or tropical jungle. Large countries like Indonesia tend to generate centrifugal resources, include disaffected minorities and accumulate grievance.¹³

¹¹ Basis Data Wilayah Administrasi Propinsi Jawa Barat Tahun 2004, Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) in cooperation with Bappeda Profinsi Jawa Barat and BPS Profinsi Jawa Barat.

¹² Alberto Abadie, Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism, NBER Working Paper No 1085, October 2004, p. 6.

¹³ Abadie, *ibid*, p. 6.

The second category is based on historical reasons, or areas with a history of rebellion, e.g., the center of Darul-Islam (the abode/domain of Islam) DI/TII movement in the Garut/Tasikmalaya region.¹⁴ The third category covers areas with a marked Wahabian¹⁵ culture, e.g. Cianjur and Garut. The fourth category covers the areas considered as terrorists' breeding places and safe havens. Areas difficult to access to offer safe haven to terrorists groups, facilitate training and provide funding through other illegal activities, such as the production and trafficking of cocaine and opiates. Based on these categories, the research was conducted in four districts : Southern Garut, Southern Cianjur, Southern Sukabumi, and Banten Province.¹⁶ The population of the province of West Java and Banten is predominantly Muslim (95%).¹⁷

Social-Economic issues

As suggested on page 2, previous research on terrorism have supported the notion that poverty generates terrorism. Social economic analysis in four researched areas will be useful to see the correlation between poverty, the increase of radicalism, and the effectiveness of using religious symbols to acquire support and solidarity among Islamic followers. In four locations in general, the number of people living below the poverty line has increased significantly.¹⁸ Even though the New Order government is considered to have applied repressive security policy and authoritarian rule, however, the economic life was much better. The unemployment rate was not as high, the price of basic needs was still reasonable. However, since Indonesia was crushed by the severe economic and monetary crisis of 1997, life has become more difficult. People of lower income

¹⁴ The DI/TII rebellion began when Kartosuwiryo, in command of the Hizbu'llah, declared a Holy War againsts the Indonesian government under President Soekarno. The DI/TII aimed to establish an Islamic state and at first aroused immense popular support but which also disrupted the lives of thousands of villagers in the Priangan (West Java area) from 1947 to 1962, resulting in the deaths of 40,000 Indonesians who were mostly Sundanese. See Linda Newland, Under the Banner of Islam: Mobilising Religious Identities in West Java, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, August 2000, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2472/is_2_11/ai_63914692/pg_5, accessed on 11 March 2006.

¹⁵ Wahabi Islam is a puritanical Saudi Islamic sect founded by Muhammad ibn-Abd-al-Wahab (1703–1792), which regards all other sects as heretical. By the early 20th century it had spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula; it still remains the official ideology of the Saudi Arabian kingdom. See www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/encyclopaedia/hutchinson/m0013745.html -14k, accessed in March 19, 2006. See also : <http://www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/encyclopaedia/hutchinson/m0013745.html>, accessed on 11 March 2006.

¹⁶ Banten was part of West Java province until the year 2000. Under the Indonesian government decree (UU) No 23/2000 Banten has been established as a separate province. See <http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banten>, accessed on March 13, 2006.

¹⁷ Basis Data, op.cit.

¹⁸ Mubyarto, Ekonomi Rakyat Indonesia Pasca Krismon, *Jurnal Ekonomi Rakyat*, Vol. I, No 9, November 2002.

group have seen their purchasing power been decrease from time to time. The biggest blow came when President Yudhoyono increased the prices of oil, gas, and electricity. The most obvious impact is the increase of the unemployment rate and the increase of the number of people living below the poverty line.¹⁹

In the village where research was conducted, the unemployment rate among the productive population is extremely high. Even though they have jobs, however, they are still “semi-unemployed”, as they are mostly working in informal sectors, e.g. as street vendors, *ojeg* (motorbike taxis), or laborers earning daily wages. The high unemployment rate and slow economic growth forced Indonesian laborers to search job overseas as migrant workers to neighboring countries (Malaysia, Singapore), or to the Middle-East countries (Saudi Arabia as the main destination). Male workers (Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or TKI) are usually employed as drivers or hard laborers in the construction sector, while female workers (known as Tenaga Kerja Wanita or female laborers) have been preferred as domestic servants.

However, workers must provide the agent with a significant amount of money to be sent overseas. For those left behind, frustration has increased, especially with the current uncertain economic conditions. These conditions form a perfect breeding ground for the rise of radicalism. Here, the benefit payoff of becoming a jihadist is that it enables him or her to attain symbolic capital (social importance). This is particularly attractive for potential recruits who have experienced the “absence of possibilities” to have a meaningful life, or who feel that they have little social worth.²⁰

West Javanese soil is considered as the most fertile in comparison to other provinces. However, agricultural sector is not a major concern of the provincial government. Mismanagement in the agricultural sector, e.g. the production cost of rice being equal or sometimes higher than the sale price of agricultural products, had caused working in the agricultural sector to be less attractive compared to becomes hard laborer in major cities or being a migrant worker. As a potential

¹⁹ Carunia Mulya Firdausy, The Social Impact of Economic Crisis in Indonesia, *Centre for Economic and Development Studies*, Indonesian Institute of Science, see <http://www.ismea.org/asialist/Firdausy.html>, accessed on March 13, 2006.

²⁰ Ghassan Hage, Comes a Time We are all Enthusiastic: Understanding Suicide Bombers in Times of Exiphobia”, *Public Culture* 15 (1), pp. 65-89.

source of income, fishery is not attractive either to the Sundanese living in the southern coastal region. Fishermen in Cianjur and Garut are still using manual labor and lack modern technology equipment to support their income-generating activities. It is not surprising that the income from fishing is inadequate and could only cover the purchase of basic needs. Another potential area that has not been developed is tourism, especially ecotourism and cultural tourism. West Java is endowed with beautiful places, beaches, and rich cultures that show potential as a source of income. Unfortunately, they have not been developed to the advantage of the population.

As in other parts in Indonesia, West Java has been experiencing wide disparity between the rich and poor. Centralized economic policy and policy focuses more on infrastructures development have left behind concern for human resources development and other social and cultural aspects. People from the grass root level have become more marginalized in the economic system. Even though the government has an excellent policy to eradicate poverty, the implementation has been poor, especially when related to the increased amount of corruption, collusion and nepotism (KKN). As a national issue, the level of corruption among the West Javanese government officers is so high that it has almost become inherent to the culture. Therefore, even though Indonesia is entering the reform era, the practice of KKN that was widely known during the New Order government is still widely practiced after changes of government.

As stated earlier, poverty is not the single factor that generates terrorism and radicalism. As demonstrated in the researched area, people with very low ability to buy food and other essentials, are supposed to receive government funds by way of compensation for the rise of oil prices. However, even though some well deserving respondents to receive compensation funds were actually excluded from the list, they refused to question the government regarding its distribution policy. They applied the attitude called *nrima* and *pasrah*, considered that all happened to their life as a fate/ divine decree (*takdir*) from God, and God is testing their faith in Him.

Islamic Teaching and Ideology

Another point to be considered in examining the characteristics of the West Javanese rural area is the role of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and its *Kyai* (Islamic teachers). In the research

region, the role of *Kyai* is most significant. As the most powerful and influential informal leaders, their statements are often considered to be unwritten law. In the *pesantren*, *Kyai* are authoritative and sole figures in religious teaching as well as in the implementation of independent curriculum at the *pesantren*. The figures of *Kyai*, their charismatic appearance and knowledge of Islam led the *santri* (Islamic pupils) to have more faith in the *Kyai* rather than in the government. However, *Kyai* without depth understanding of Islam often triggered to misinterpretation of Islamic teachings, e.g. understanding of Jihad.²¹

However, their view of Islam, especially in regard to the relationship with the West needs to be discussed in correlation to the role of international media. As a main source of information, the population relied almost entirely on television news programs, while newspapers, radio broadcasts and other mass media are less popular. Television had undoubtedly played the most significant role in drawing perception of Sundanese population of international politics and their position against the West. In regard to terrorism, televised terrorists' biography and their actions are often counterproductive to the purpose of reducing terrorism. New terrorists' recruits often join after they had viewed television news programs on terrorists' trials and testimonies.²²

A poignant example of media battle space was shown in the trials of the terrorists behind the first Bali bomb, Amrozi bin Nurhasyim and Abdul Azis alias Imam Samudera in 2003. They rejoiced in their death sentences, shouting: "Allahu Akbar!" (God the mightiest). Both terrorists used their highly publicized trials as a mouthpiece for inspiring potential recruits to the cause, as well as for gaining sympathy among ordinary Muslims. This is illustrated by Samudra's following comments: "In death we live peacefully and in death we draw near to God". Another comment is: "I'd like to say thank you to the prosecutors, which has demanded the death sentences".²³

²¹ **Jihad** (*Arabic*: جهاد *jihād*) is an [Islamic term](#), from the Arabic root *jhd* ("to exert utmost effort, to strive, struggle"), which connotes a wide range of meanings: anything from an inward [spiritual](#) struggle to attain perfect [faith](#) to a [political](#) or [militant](#) struggle to defend or further Islam. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jihad>, accessed on 17 March 2006.

²² Sukawarsini Djelantik, Terorisme dan Media Massa, *Jurnal Ilmiah Hubungan Internasional*, Vol. I, No. 1, January 2005. pp. 14-28.

²³ Jihadists as Liminal Beings, p. 541.

International Political Issue

The present international political system is perceived as uncondusive to the interest of the Islamic states. Even before the 9/11 bomb blast in the US, resentment against the US was high in countries with a Muslim majority.²⁴ Sympathy for the Palestinians, were perceived as being victimized by the Israeli, are also high among the Sundanese.

In contrast to the aim of US policy in the global war on terrorism to eradicate international terrorism after 9/11, this research suggests that the US policy is counterproductive to its interests. Respondents' antipathy towards the US increased conspicuously after it declared war to Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover it increased their awareness and "Islamic brotherhood solidarity" especially after television broadcasted US arrogance towards their "Islamic brothers".

Below are opinions regarding Indonesian and international terrorism as extracted from interviews and during focus group discussions:

- The respondents support the 9/11 terrorist attack on WTC and the Pentagon. They believe that the US deserved to be destroyed since it is considered to be pro-Israel/Zionist. During the Israel-Palestinian war, the US and its Zionist's allies have intimidated the Palestinians, and then the Iraqis and the Afghan. They been call to wage jihad against the US and its allies.
- Osama bin Laden is an imaginary actor created by the US to discredit the Islamic world.
- Osama Bin Laden is considered as Islamic hero. He has even been compared to Robin Hood in terms of supporting the marginalized groups (Islamic/Muslim population and the Muslims living in developing countries).
- Support terrorists' attacks in Indonesia, especially bombs in Bali. Bali deserved to be the terrorists' target because it is considered to be a "maksiat" (sinful)²⁵ place, and many American and Western tourists have been visiting Bali as holiday destination.

²⁴ Djelantik, Sukawarsini, Teroris Internasional: Aktor Bukan Negara dalam Hubungan Internasional, in Andre Pareira (Ed), Perubahan Global dan Perkembangan Studi Hubungan Internasional, Parahyangan center for International Studies (PACIS), PT Citra Aditya Bakti, Bandung, 1999, p. 174.

²⁵ Definition of *maksiat* explained here is gambling, zina (illicit sex), prostitution, and drinking alcoholic beverages. See for example in <http://islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=285>, accessed on 11 March 2006. Related to this context, according to Islamic fundamentalist and jihadists' belief, Bali is a *maksiat* place because of it

- The Bomb blasts in Indonesia were conducted by US and its Zionist allies. The terrorist attacks then were followed by accusation of Islamic groups to find the government's justification to suppress Islamic groups.
- The two most wanted masterminds of Indonesian terrorism, the Malaysian nationals Dr. Azahari and Noordin Mohammad Top are only Indonesian police's imaginary actors. The police needed to find scapegoats for damage done by terrorists', as well as to hide their incompetence to provide security.
- The terrorists behind the Bali bomb, such as Amrozi and Imam Samudra are the victims of the police and the Indonesian government. Some respondents believe they must have been strongly forced by the police to admit their involvement.
- If they were being offered to join the jihad to Afghanistan or Iraq, they would be pleased to serve, as the best opportunity to pursue a so-called ticket to heaven. They believe as soldier of Islam (Hizbullah), they are promised paradise as glorious martyrs, while the one left behind would be recipients of a global Islamic state²⁶ or of local bylaws based on *Syariah* (Islamic law).
- As found in the "last night video shoot" of the actors of the second Bali bomb, they believe that martyrdom operations are permissible in Islamic law.

The above opinions represent only a small percentage compared to the total population. However, the statements are significant considering that a massive bomb blast only needed one suicide bomber as the operator.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The Sundanese population is well known for being a peace loving and devoted Muslims. However, because some of Indonesian terrorists are came from this area, this research has been conducted in the area in order to answer the question of contributive factors that led to the emergence of radicalism and terrorism. Research in less privilege regions have suggested that poverty is not the only factor that generates terrorism. Other social-economic issues, especially related to the government's development policy also form dominant factors in increasing

population is predominantly non-Muslim. Moreover, Bali is also a favorite tourists destination and adapted Western cultures, e.g. many shops, café, restaurants served alcohol.

²⁶ Saniotis, op.cit, p. 533.

dissatisfaction among the population. The impact of globalization, especially related to the role of mass media is also responsible for establishing opinions on international and national politics. Last but not least is the role of informal leaders and Islamic teachings at the religious schools known as *pesantren*.

Based on the above discussion, the author's recommendations are as follows:

- Implement poverty eradication programs according to the region's specific needs and characteristics.
- To reduce the feeling of injustice, the government needs to enforce law and equality before the law.
- To reduce the level of KKN. Even though the present government is strongly concerned about this issue, the practice has remained as massive as in the New Order era.
- To pay more attention to education programs and provide more job opportunities.
- As a main source of information, entertainment and the formulation of public opinion, the content of television programs need to be re-evaluated. At present, programs heavily expose the life of upper-middle social-economic levels. Realistic views of the life of the majority of Indonesians need to have more exposure. To minimize tension among inter religious groups, television also needs to expose more moderate religious views.

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