

or relatives.²⁴ In eight cases, the major charge was “planning to travel to Iraq to fight Americans.”²⁵ Although not all of the 22 cases were connected to al-Zarqawi or AQI, they demonstrate the worrying spread of Salafi-jihadi ideals into the Levant.

Some of the Jordanian court cases established links between Jordanian jihadists and other militants in the Levant region. Shakir al-Khatib, for example, is the leader of a group on trial in Jordan charged with plotting to blow up Christian churches and attacking a Lebanese choir in July 2008.²⁶ He was not trained in Jordan, however, but instead in the Ain al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. According to the indictment, he allegedly pledged *bay`at* (oath of loyalty) to al-Qa`ida and wanted to fight in Iraq.²⁷ In 2005, the Khatab Brigades was a group seeking to fight in Iraq and to also implement terrorist attacks in Jordan.²⁸ Another example is of two leading Salafi-jihadi leaders in the Ain al-Hilwah refugee camp who were tried in absentia in Jordan: Usama al-Shihabi (Abu al-Zahra) and Haytham al-Saadi (Abu Tariq). Al-Shihabi was the leader of Jund al-Sham in Lebanon, an organization supposedly founded by al-Zarqawi himself when he was in Afghanistan’s Herat Province.²⁹ Al-Saadi is the brother of Asbat al-Ansar leader Abu Muhjin.³⁰

Another effect of al-Zarqawi’s legacy is his impact on the Palestinian diaspora in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Socio-political conditions in Palestinian refugee camps in these countries play an important role in increasing the influence of al-Zarqawi’s ideology. Jordan’s Irbid camp, for example, is close to the Syrian border and has emerged as a crossing point for Salafi-jihadis heading to Iraq or Lebanon, as seen through evidence

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 *Al-Hayat*, January 28, 2009.

27 Ibid.; Also see Murad Batal al-Shishani, “Al-Zarqawi’s Legacy Seen in Trial of Jordanian al-Qaeda Cell,” *Terrorism Focus* 6:4 (2009).

28 *Al-Ghad*, December 7, 2005; *Jordan Times*, September 14, 2006.

29 “Tantheem Jund al-Sham Bada’ ma’a al-Zarqawi fi Afghanistan w Antaqal Beza’amt Abu Yousof ila Mukhaim A’in al-Hilweh,” *Asbarq al-Awsat*, May 25, 2007.

30 “Al-Zarqawi Yoa’in Abu Muhjin al-Mutarad al-Falastini Qaedan Maydanyan,” *Elaph*, August 16, 2005.

uncovered during the ongoing trials of Salafi-jihadis in Jordan.

Jihad al-Qashih was originally from the Irbid camp, as was Suleiman Ghayyad al-Anjadi, who was killed by Jordanian authorities after an armed confrontation in 2007. Al-Anjadi was accused of attempting to help Azmi al-Jayousi—who was sent to Jordan by al-Zarqawi to lead the 2004 chemical cell—escape from prison with the help of other militants. Al-Anjadi is also accused of plotting to assassinate U.S. President George W. Bush during his visit to Jordan in 2006.

Conclusion

Despite his death in 2006, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi’s legacy lives on. His speeches and tactics have influenced militants in the Levant. Just as worrying, his so-called “heirs” continue to promote his legacy on jihadist web forums. The neo-Zarqawist movement has been able to mobilize and attract supporters despite its lack of a “legitimate” ideology when compared to Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and his followers.

Al-Zarqawi’s followers are even more radical than al-Maqdisi and the other established Salafi-jihadi theorists because they are pursuing a more unrestrained form of warfare. If his legacy gains further traction among the Salafi-jihadi community, it could mean a rise in terrorist plots in the relatively stable Levant region.

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The July 17 Jakarta Suicide Attacks and the Death of Noordin Top

By Noor Huda Ismail

ON JULY 17, 2009, two suicide bombers struck the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta, Indonesia, killing seven people. Indonesian authorities are still investigating the attacks and have not yet compiled enough evidence to know the exact parties responsible. Speculation, however, fell on Noordin Mohamed Top, a militant who led a faction of the al-Qa`ida-linked Jemaah Islamiya (JI) terrorist group.¹ The hotel bombings shocked Indonesia because conditions in the country have been relatively peaceful since the last attack by Noordin’s group in Bali in 2005. In the 2005 attack, three bombs struck two tourist areas, killing at least 26 people, among them foreign nationals.²

Since 2002, Indonesian authorities have managed to arrest most of JI’s senior members. More importantly, they have succeeded in gleaning information about the JI network and ideology from interrogations. Authorities have also confiscated a significant amount of JI’s explosives material, and they have foiled various plots, such as an attempt to blow up a café frequented by Western tourists in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra in 2008 and the planned assassination of a foreign national there.³ Most significantly, after nearly seven frustrating years of near misses and false leads, Indonesian authorities finally managed to kill Noordin Top on September 17 at the end of a bloody nine-hour siege in Central Java.⁴ Despite Noordin’s death, JI, and especially the remaining members of Noordin’s pro-bombing faction, remains a threat to Indonesian security.

1 Jemaah Islamiya is no longer a cohesive organization with a unified leadership structure. Divisions appeared in the group after the first Bali bombing in 2002. Noordin’s faction is the only group in Indonesia that has conducted suicide attacks.

2 “Bali Bomb Attacks Claim 26 Lives,” BBC, October 2, 2005.

3 International Crisis Group, “Indonesia: Radicalisation of the Palembang Group,” May 20, 2009.

4 “Indonesian Police: DNA Proves It Was Noordin,” *Jakarta Globe*, September 18, 2009.

This article will offer a profile of Noordin Mohamed Top, describe his pro-bombing faction of JI, and assess the future dangers posed by this violent faction.

Profile of Noordin Mohamed Top

Jemaah Islamiya is currently a crippled organization. It officially opposes bombings and encourages its members not to participate in attacks.⁵ JI's mainstream faction has adopted a "soft" approach to its mission of Darul Islam⁶ and has focused on preaching and conducting charity work. Yet its potential for violence remains as a result of an internal split that created a more hardcore splinter group led by Malaysian JI member Noordin Mohamed Top. Noordin has orchestrated terrorist operations in Indonesia since his first attack on the JW Marriott in 2003.

Born on August 11, 1968 in Malaysia, Noordin was charismatic and generally reserved.⁷ One of his former associates described him as a man of high discipline in carrying out *amaliyya* (the code for terrorist acts).⁸ He switched locations regularly and never used a cellular phone.⁹ He was considered an expert at avoiding security forces. According to Ali Imron,¹⁰ who was involved in the first Bali bombing, Noordin was a student of the late JI leader Ali Ghufron (also known as Mukhlis)¹¹ when he taught in Pesantren Lukmanul

Hakim¹² in the 1990s in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. When Noordin joined the JI organization, he was still a lecturer at a university in Malaysia where he taught computer science.

Noordin was not involved in the 2002 Bali bombing because he had just arrived in Indonesia. This allowed him to avoid arrest when governments in the region rounded up a number of senior JI members, especially in Malaysia. Noordin's role in JI and terrorism increased after his mentor, Ali Ghufron, was arrested in December 2002. Noordin wanted to continue his mentor's struggle by assuming leadership of all future bombing campaigns, beginning with the August 2003 JW Marriott bombing in Jakarta. It is not clear whether Noordin had actual bomb-making experience; his skill-set was as a recruiter and manager.

Over the years, Noordin grew increasingly radical and seemingly adopted some of al-Qa`ida's video propaganda tactics. After the death of his JI associate and bomb expert Azahari¹³ in 2005, for example, Noordin released a video threatening the West:

As long as you keep your troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and intimidate Muslim people, you will feel our intimidation and our terror...America, Australia, England and Italy. You will be the target of our next attack. Especially for Australia, as long as its troops are in Afghanistan and Iraq and engage in intimidation there, you will also feel our intimidation.¹⁴

The video was posed in a Zarqawi-like setting, with a masked man, believed to be Noordin, explicitly threatening the West.

Noordin Top's Faction

The number of hardcore members in Noordin's JI faction is not known, although some analysts believe it is no more than a handful. Noordin's faction is known to actively seek martyrdom operations. The group's main principle to live by is *Innal hayata la aqidatun wal jihad*

(life's purpose is to maintain faith and jihad).¹⁵ Due to the group's willingness to accept martyrdom operations, they are ready to face various challenges and risks, including the threat of prison or death. As stated by one prisoner who was implicated in the 2005 Bali bombings, "To die fighting for our faith is noble, and heaven awaits our arrival with 72 beautiful angels."¹⁶

One imprisoned militant, interviewed in June 2009, explained how Noordin recruited new martyrs: "At the moment, Noordin never goes looking for people committed to the cause, but rather young people seek him out to sacrifice themselves. If you are on the same track, you will be able to find him."¹⁷ Committed martyrs consider their actions as *istishbad* (the search to become a *shahid*, or martyr), and not suicide.

Eluding Arrest and Recruiting New Members

For the last seven years, Noordin managed to elude arrest because he enjoyed protection from hardcore members of the JI community and other individuals who shared his ideology. His sympathizers consider the Indonesian government a "secular government which has succumbed to the interests of the USA and its allies; it is therefore the enemy and may be engaged in combat."¹⁸ Although internal differences among JI members are apparent, it has not regressed to the point that group members are regularly cooperating with authorities in arrests.

Although Noordin's splinter faction is likely under 50 members,¹⁹ it has the full support of dedicated youth who share a deep commitment to the jihadist cause. This allows the faction to recruit new members. According to one member of Noordin's faction when describing its agenda, "Don't just stick to the big *jamaah* (group). We have to support jihad anywhere and everywhere including in Iraq."²⁰ For this member, jihad is

5 Personal interview, Abu Rusdan, leader of JI's mainstream faction, Central Java, Indonesia, June 2009.

6 Its mission is to reach a world of Darul Islam, or the abode of Islam in Indonesia and beyond.

7 Personal interview, Abdullah Sunata, Jakarta Police Detention, Indonesia, August 2009. Sunata met with Noordin in 2004 when Noordin sought help from Sunata. Sunata refused to help Noordin because for Sunata the use of violence is only justified in conflict zones, not in peaceful cities such as Jakarta or Bali.

8 Personal interview, Jack Harun, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia, June 2009. Harun was arrested for his involvement as Noordin's courier and right-hand man. Harun was recently released from prison.

9 Ibid.

10 Personal interview, Ali Imron, Jakarta, Indonesia, June 2009. Ali Imron is one of the main actors of the first Bali bombing. He is also the younger brother of the late Ali Ghufron. Ali Imron spent some time in Johor Bahru where he met Top.

11 Ghufron planned and executed the 2002 Bali bombing and was executed by the Indonesian government in November 2008.

12 *Pesantren* are Islamic boarding schools.

13 Azahari was killed by Indonesian police in 2005. He was a bomb expert with JI.

14 BBC, November 18, 2005.

15 Personal interview, Anif Solchanudin, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia, June 2009.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Personal interview, Ali Imron, Jakarta, Indonesia, June 2009.

19 There is insufficient evidence to know the size of the faction, but the author estimates around 20 hardcore members.

20 Personal interview, Urwah, Solo, Central Java, Indo-

fard`ayn (personal obligation) and it is therefore legitimate for any group or individual to carry out jihad based on their own initiatives and methods.

In this context, Noordin won fresh recruits from among hardcore members who “idolized” him and believed that the use of violence against the enemies of Islam is justified in any situation. Hardcore members also consider many senior JI members to be “NATO” (No Action, Talk Only) and no longer passionate in their commitment to the jihadist movement. This is because many JI members have matured, married and taken on family considerations.²¹

Members of Noordin’s pro-bombing faction are a fringe minority within JI. Nevertheless, it does not take a large organization to commit major terrorist attacks. The 2005 Bali bombing, for example, was committed by only three individuals who were willing to blow themselves up for the cause.²²

Future Dangers

Noordin’s death is a major government success. Yet if it is determined that Noordin’s faction was behind the July 17 Jakarta attacks, it demonstrates an advanced level of efficiency, sophistication and novelty of tactics compared to their previous operations that relied on vehicles and backpack bombs.²³ In the case of the 2009 Jakarta hotel bombings, Noordin’s key associate, Syaifudin Zuhri, allegedly recruited both of the suicide bombers and had them stay overnight in luxurious hotels.²⁴ The recruits assembled their bombs inside their hotel rooms. This allowed maximum operational security.

It is possible that Syaifudin Zuhri will succeed Noordin with the help from at least three of his followers, including

nesia, June 2009. He died together with Noordin during the police raid on September 17, 2009.

²¹ This statement is based on the author’s personal observations after a series of interviews with senior JI members.

²² In this attack, Salik Firdaus recruited two suicide bombers and he himself was the third suicide bomber.

²³ Based on evidence acquired from the attack, it is highly likely that Noordin’s faction is to blame. There are direct connections between the current suspects and Noordin. Moreover, Noordin’s faction is the only group in Indonesia that has conducted suicide bombings.

²⁴ *Gatra*, August 27, 2009.

Nur Hasbi, who is wanted in connection with the July 17 bombings. Two other possible successors are Reno (also known as Tedi) and Maruto Jati Sulistiono.

Unfortunately, there is no way to draw a profile of future JI suicide bombers. Previous profiles of suicide bombers, for example, describe young men, religiously devout, alienated from society, and social and psychological outcasts. Yet the two bombers in the 2009 Jakarta hotel bombings did not fit this profile. Dani Dwi Permana, 18-years-old, was a former high school student in Bogor, West Java. Dani’s teacher described him as not very talkative, but intelligent and diligent in his studies.²⁵ Dani sat on the executive committee of the school’s Intra-School Students Organization (OSIS) and was known by all of the school’s students.²⁶ He passed the school’s final examination in 2009, but still had to collect his SMA (high school) diploma.²⁷ In the case of the second bomber, Nana Supriyatna, 28-years-old, his neighbors describe him as “sociable” and “friendly.”²⁸ No one terrorist profile is likely to ever be drawn.

Noordin’s faction will continue to rely on the traditional tools of recruitment such as schools, kinship networks, friendships and small Islamic discussion groups.²⁹ To make matters more difficult, Noordin’s group have also embraced new technologies such as CDs, DVDs, coded SMS messages, secure e-mail, and password-protected websites to communicate and connect to new potential recruits. Until Noordin’s faction is dismantled, Indonesia will remain at risk for future terrorist attacks.

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²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “JW Marriott Hotel Bomber was Bogor High-School Student,” *Antara News*, August 10, 2009.

²⁸ *Gatra*, August 27, 2009.

²⁹ These discussions, consisting of six-to-ten people, meet regularly for a number of social and religious activities. Due to their perceived harmless nature, these groups inhibit authorities from preventing possible violent outcomes.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

August 1, 2009 (SOMALIA): Burundi’s military announced that a third battalion of 850 soldiers had been deployed to Somalia to reinforce the African Union peacekeeping force in Mogadishu. – *AFP*, August 1

August 2, 2009 (RUSSIA): Militants attacked a three-vehicle police convoy in the mountains of southern Chechnya, killing “several” officers. – *Voice of America*, August 3

August 3, 2009 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video message saying that the group’s “truce” offer to the United States still stands. The conditions of the truce demand that the United States remove all troops from Muslim lands and that Western countries stop supporting “corrupt and apostate regimes in the Muslim world,” among other conditions. – *CBC News*, August 3

August 3, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb exploded near a police convoy in the western city of Herat, killing at least 10 people. The Taliban claimed responsibility, and said that the target was a local police chief. The local police chief was wounded in the attack. – *New York Times*, August 3

August 4, 2009 (AUSTRALIA): More than 400 police officers raided properties across Melbourne in a major Australian counterterrorism operation. Authorities arrested four men suspected of planning a “suicide terrorist attack on a defense establishment within Australia involving an armed assault with automatic weapons.” The men allegedly wanted to “kill as many soldiers as they could before they themselves were killed.” The four men were all between the ages of 22 to 26 and were Australian citizens of Somali or Lebanese descent. Police claim that the men are linked to al-Shabab, an insurgent group in Somalia that has ties to al-Qa`ida. – *al-Jazeera*, August 4

August 4, 2009 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb exploded under the convoy of the governor of Wardak Province. There were no injuries. – *Guardian*, August 4