



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH

A Centre of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

Spot Report on the Jakarta Hotel Blasts 17 July 2009

The Incident

On 17 July 2009, bomb explosions rocked the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and the JW Marriot Hotel in the upscale Mega Kuningan District in Jakarta, Indonesia. The blasts occurred at about 0730 local time or 0030 GMT.¹ As of 1250hours officials reported that the nearly simultaneous blasts killed nine people and wounded at least 50 others² - a number of foreigners were reported to be among the victims. No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks which came just days after the Indonesian presidential elections which was won by incumbent President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.



Figure 1 Map showing general location of the Mega Kuningan District in Jakarta, Indonesia (Photo credit to AFP)

¹ "Fatal blasts hit Jakarta hotels", BBC News, 17 July 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/8155084.stm>

² "Officials: Jakarta hotel blasts kill 9, wound 50", Today Online, 17 July 2009, <http://www.todayonline.com/BreakingNews/EDC090717-0000144/Officials--Jakarta-hotel-blasts-kill-9,-wound-50>

Tactics and Impact

Indonesian police said that the bombs were planted at the Ritz-Carlton's Air Langga restaurant and the basement of the JW Marriot.³ There were no confirmed reports as to the structure and composition of the bombs except that they were described as "high explosive bombs".⁴



Figure 2 Photo showing the general site of the blasts (Photo credit to Detik News)

Witnesses reported hearing an explosion and seeing smoke coming from the Marriot Hotel.⁵ After five minutes, another explosion was heard coming from the Ritz-Carlton.⁶ Police have said however that the explosions were two minutes apart.⁷ The blasts sent a huge plume of smoke into the sky; debris and shattered glass were scattered across the street.⁸ The façade of the Ritz-Carlton and a second-storey restaurant were reported to have suffered the brunt of the damage while there was little damage to the JW Marriot Hotel that was visible from the outside.⁹



Figure 3 Photographs showing the damaged façade of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel (Photo Credit to AFP and CNN)

³ "Officials: Jakarta hotel blasts kill 9, wound 50", Today Online, 17 July 2009,

<http://www.todayonline.com/BreakingNews/EDC090717-0000144/Officials--Jakarta-hotel-blasts-kill-9,-wound-50>

⁴ "Bombs kill nine in Jakarta hotels: police", Google news, 17 July 2009,

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hbbVcUu38oKIgvx2GXo23Ey2ev7g>

⁵ "Six killed in central Jakarta hotel blasts-police", Reuters Alertnet, 17 July 2009,

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SP522493.htm>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ "Officials: Jakarta hotel blasts kill 9, wound 50", Today Online, 17 July 2009,

<http://www.todayonline.com/BreakingNews/EDC090717-0000144/Officials--Jakarta-hotel-blasts-kill-9,-wound-50>

⁸ "Bombs kill nine in Jakarta hotels: police", Google news, 17 July 2009,

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hbbVcUu38oKIgvx2GXo23Ey2ev7g>

⁹ Ibid



Figure 4 Photograph of the façade of the JW Marriot Hotel (Photo credit to AFP)

Six people were reported to have died at the JW Marriot Hotel while there were 2 people killed at the Ritz-Carlton. The ninth fatality was an injured person who died while undergoing treatment at the Medistra Hospital. Witnesses at the scene reported seeing Indonesians and foreign nationals being evacuated from the area. Out of the 55 injured, 18 of them are foreigners including five Americans, one Italian, one Norwegian. The number of casualties from the two bombings is expected to rise.

Reports suggest that the attacks may have been perpetrated by suicide bombers due to the discovery of two headless bodies at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. However, the information has yet to be validated by the authorities.

Group Responsible

The Indonesian police have said that it was “too early to say whether the bombs were planted by Islamic militants”.¹⁰ Members of the Islamic militant network Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) were the ones behind the 2002 Bali bombings which killed more than 200 people and the 2003 attack on the JW Marriot Hotel which killed 12 people. These past years, the Indonesian government has embarked on massive counterterrorism operations which have resulted in the significant weakening of the group. Authorities have arrested many of the top leadership of the JI including those responsible for the 2002 bombings in Bali.

JI however, is still regarded to be a capable organization and is believed to be quite capable of carrying out terrorist attacks along the scale of the recent hotel bombings.¹¹ An article from The Australian said that two recent developments may change the current assessment that the threat

¹⁰ “Bombs kill nine in Jakarta hotels: police”, Google news, 17 July 2009, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hbbVcUu38oKIgvx2GXo23Ey2ev7g>

¹¹ Ibid

from the JI is waning.¹² The first is that the JI leadership is in turmoil and its future direction remains unclear.¹³ Secondly, the “release from prison of former JI members, including some who reject police efforts to rehabilitate them, might now re-energize the movement towards violent attacks”.¹⁴ It could be that for some dissident JI members, a bombing campaign might be the only way that they could achieve their political objectives.

Security Response

The lessons learnt from the 2002 Bali bombings and the 2003 attack on the JW Marriot have resulted in most major hotels in Jakarta improving on their security measures. Most hotels have implemented checkpoints for incoming vehicles and required hotel guests and visitors to pass through metal detectors.¹⁵ It remains a question as to how the perpetrators of the 17 July 2009 Jakarta hotel bombings were able to circumvent the security measures that are in place.

Immediately following the hotel bombings, anti-terror forces and emergency teams were at the scene of both blasts. A third explosion in the Muara Angke area of northern Jakarta was initially believed to be related to the hotel bombings but further investigation revealed that the explosion was caused by a faulty battery and not a bomb.¹⁶



Figure 5 Photo of Indonesian police securing the vicinity of the Ritz-Carlton hotels (Photo credit to CNN)

Police response to the bombings was immediate and guests at both hotels have been evacuated and moved to secure locations.¹⁷ As investigators and policemen secured the scene of the

¹²“JI jihadis still plot terrorism”, The Australian, 17 July 2009, <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25792430-7583,00.html>

¹³ “Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ “Bomb blasts in Jakarta”, Straits Times, 17 July 2009, http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/SE%2BAsia/Story/STIStory_404333.html

¹⁶ “3rd blast not a bomb”, Straits Times, 17 July 2009, http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/SE%2BAsia/Story/STIStory_404393.html

¹⁷ “Travelers postpone their trips to Jakarta”, News.Com.Au, 17 July 2009, <http://www.news.com.au/travel/story/0,28318,25795552-5014090,00.html>

bombings, they discovered what they believe was the “control center” for the attacks.¹⁸ Police recovered an unexploded bomb and other explosive materials inside room number 1808 at the JW Marriot.¹⁹

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has not raised its travel advice warning level for Indonesia despite the bombings but the overall level of advice remains to be at “reconsider your need to travel”.²⁰ The New Zealand Embassy has advised its citizens against tourist and other non-essential travel to Indonesia due to the continuing threat of terrorism amidst reports that one of their citizens died in the bombings.²¹

Assessment

The Indonesian government has made significant progress in counterterrorism and addressing security threats from militant and radical groups which has contributed to the country’s sense of political stability in recent years. The country has been successful in building up an image of security these past few years and it has emerged as one of the biggest economies in Southeast Asia.

The attacks against the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and the JW Marriot Hotel were the first major terrorist attacks in Indonesia in more than three years since the start of the government’s counterterrorism operations. Both hotels are also seen to be among the most secure in Jakarta and the attacks could severely affect investor confidence because they occurred amidst a stable security environment and tough counterterrorist measures implemented by the Indonesian government.

¹⁸ “Unexploded bomb found in JW Marriot in Indonesia”, Channel News Asia, 17 July 2009, http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/443008/1/.html

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ “Travelers postpone their trips to Jakarta”, News.Com.Au, 17 July 2009, <http://www.news.com.au/travel/story/0,28318,25795552-5014090,00.html>

²¹ “NZ witnesses describe Jakarta bombings”, Brisbane Times, 17 July 2009, <http://news.brisbanetimes.com.au/breaking-news-world/nz-witnesses-describe-jakarta-bombings-20090717-dnw8.html>