

## **Under the Radar, a Threat to Rival JI**

**Rebecca Lunn** | May 27, 2011

Jemaah Islamiyah is still often the first name associated with terrorism in Indonesia. Even recent attacks such as the spate of book bombs in Jakarta in March had some referring directly to JI as the perpetrator while others were more subtle, referring to “old players.”

The automatic tendency to see JI as the most likely culprit of terrorist attacks today is often not only erroneous, but dangerous. Since the Australian Embassy bombing in 2004, JI-related attacks were led only by Noordin M. Top, who was killed in September 2009. There has been no indication that anyone has been able to fill his position. He did not have the support of the mainstream JI that advocates dakwah, or religious outreach, over violent jihad. Indeed, if JI individuals are involved in incidents it is less as a part of the JI organization and more in cooperation with other organizations.

The issue is not so much that this tendency is erroneous, but rather that it is dangerous. Although JI is still considered a threat, the tendency to see it as the tier-one threat blinds us to danger of other groups. More specifically, it has stopped us from seeing the real threat that Abu Bakar Bashir’s newest organization, Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, poses.

The organization is, in fact, very similar to JI. It has the same leader, similar structure and is based on the same ideology and tactics, albeit with some adjustments to match contemporary trends. It is these adjustments that actually make it a more dangerous and unpredictable threat. For instance, the turn to ightiyalat (secret assassination) attacks against both foreigners and local authorities or community figures. In addition, JAT has also recruited many JI members, in addition to those from a range of other organizations, including Darul Islam, Kompak, Jamaah Tauhid wal Jihad, Jamaah As-Sunnah and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI).

Like JI, JAT has shown an ability to work across groups, and has been able to run an above-ground organization focusing on dakwah and community service programs with branches spread throughout Java and Sumatra, while at the same time unofficially supporting elements involved in underground terrorist activities. This is where its danger lies, as it has successfully camouflaged the extent of its terrorist activities from most observers.

However, JAT members have without doubt been involved in the following incidents: Sigit Qurdowi, likely a member of JAT’s alleged armed wing, Laskar Hisbah, was shot in Sukoharjo on May 14. He was suspected of involvement in the April 15 Cirebon suicide bombing among other things. Musolah, thought to have prepared the explosives used in that bombing, was also a JAT member. Police are still following up on other leads linking more JAT members to the bombing, which only killed the attacker.

Last year in North Sumatra, the robbery of a CIMB Niaga bank branch in Medan on Aug. 18 and the retaliatory attack against police in Hamparan Perak on Sept. 22 in response to the arrests and killings of some of those involved in the robbery, involved former members of the Indonesian Mujahideen Council (MMI) — and hence very likely JAT members. The robbery itself was

thought to have been masterminded by Abu Tholut, head of Laskar Hisbah and a member of JAT's advisory council, for terrorist activity related to the Tandzim Al Qaeda Serambi Mekkah (Al Qaeda in Aceh) training camp in Aceh. The camp involved a wide range of JAT figures, including the organization's leader Bashir, members of its advisory council such as Lutfi Haidaroh alias Ubaid; Mustaqim alias Abu Yusuf; Abdul Haris, who is the head of JAT's Jakarta branch; and members of various district-level branches such as Syarif Usman (South Jakarta) and Hariadi Usman (Bekasi).

In addition, smaller groups have been linked to JAT, such as a band of bomb-makers in Bandung who were rounded up in August 2010.

Other occasions have involved JAT working with members of JI or other radical organizations.

For instance, Heri Suranto (second secretary of JAT in Solo, Central Java) had organized a religious study group led by Ustad Urwah (JI) for a group of relatively young men in Solo. After Urwah's death, Abu Tholut and Joko Purwanto (JI) took over. Joko had given the group basic military and religious training by the time it was rounded up in May last year.

JAT is clearly a danger, but seems to have slipped under the radar. The organization needs to be monitored carefully, and not only for its underground terrorist activities.

The religious education sessions JAT runs for non-JAT members or groups facilitate the spreading of radical ideas and aid recruitment of individuals to JAT or other radical organizations.

Second, the community service programs that JAT runs — more effectively than the government as it happens, particularly in the wake of natural disasters such as the Mount Merapi eruptions in 2010 — also pose a threat to the government's credibility in the eyes of society.

Analysts and the government, at all levels, need to be aware of the tendency to see JI as the most significant threat in Indonesia, and need to be prepared to leave the comfort that comes with their knowledge about JI. They need to start accepting that JAT poses a serious threat that warrants extensive investigation.

Then again, what's in a name?

That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet — or in this case as dangerous, given the remarkable similarities between JAT and JI.

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