Al Qaeda in Southeast Asia: Exploring the Linkages

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At the advent of the War on Terror in the fall of 2001, there was a great deal of skepticism by politicians and pundits alike that Al Qaeda had penetrated the region. The conventional wisdom was that although every country in Southeast Asia has a Muslim community, indeed Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, Islam was built upon indigenous culture and was thus more moderate. The vast majority of Muslims in Southeast Asia are secular and tolerant and they eschew the violence and radicalism associated with Islam in the Middle East and South Asia. Because Southeast Asia was the “Islamic fringe,” few believed that Al Qaeda could have penetrated these societies, leading to both denial and complacency by several governments to devastating results. It was not until the 12 October 2002 terrorist attack on Bali, 13 months after 11 September attacks on the United States, that opinions began to change and the Indonesian government acknowledged that Al Qaeda was active within the archipelago.

A thorough study of Al Qaeda’s penetration of Southeast Asia, and its linkages to regional groups such as the Jemaah Islamiya, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Rabitatul Mujiheddin and other organizations, is impossible in the space allotted, and I refer people to my study, Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda’s Southeast Asian Network.

This paper seeks to explain the linkages of Al Qaeda to the region, but also explore what is the nature of those linkages. At one end of the spectrum, there are clearly groups and individuals who are influenced by and share a similar world view as Osama bin Laden. Indeed, Al Qaeda in many ways has been transformed from an organization to an ideology. At the other end of the spectrum Al Qaeda has established its own network and grafted onto pre-existing Islamic movements and found common cause with them, such as with the MILF.

One thing that is absolutely clear: in 1995 when the Ramzi Yousef cell was broken up and he and his two co-conspirators were arrested, no intelligence or law enforcement agencies looked beyond that case. Ramzi Yousef was treated as a lone wolf there to conduct a single operation, not part of an international network. No one asked why Al Qaeda came to the Philippines and if they were linking up to regional groups. There were only three arrests and the entire infrastructure was left in place.

1. Understanding Al Qaeda
To understand how Al Qaeda penetrated Southeast Asia, you have to conceptualize what Al Qaeda as an organization is. If you believe it to be a large, centralized, top-down, organization, you are missing the point. Al Qaeda is truly a network. As John Arquilla notes, Al Qaeda was developed along "diverse,
dispersed nodes who share a set of ideas and interests and who are arrayed to act in a fully internetted ‘all-channel’ manner.¹ [See diagram 1]

Ideally there is no central leadership, command, or headquarters—no precise heart or head that can be targeted. The network as a whole (but not necessarily each node) has little to no hierarchy, and there may be multiple leaders. Decision-making and operations are decentralized, allowing for local initiative and autonomy. Thus the design may appear acephalous (headless), and at other times polycephalous (hydra-headed).²

“Vertically, Al-Qaeda is organized with Bin Laden, the emir-general, at the top, followed by other Al-Qaeda leaders and leaders of the constituent groups. Horizontally, it is integrated with 24 constituent groups. The vertical integration is formal, the horizontal integration, informal.”³ Al Qaeda is highly compartmentalized. “These groups share the principles of the networked organization—relatively flat hierarchies, decentralization and delegation of decision-making authority and loose lateral ties among dispersed groups and individuals.”⁴ This is not to say that they are completely independent and autonomous, but once they have received the “direction” from Al Qaeda leaders, local operatives have some degree of flexibility in executing operations. [See Diagram 2]

2. Why Southeast Asia?
There are a number of reasons why Al Qaeda turned to Southeast Asia. The first and foremost is that these are “countries of convenience” making it an important back office of operations. Most had lax visa requirements (Malaysia or Indonesia for OIC states), were transit hubs (Thailand) or had porous borders (Philippines and Indonesia). The Philippines did not even have a computerized immigration system in place until a few years ago, making it easy to launder identities. Police and security forces were corrupt, allowing terrorists space to operate and train, and there were vast regions not under firm central government control in Indonesia and the Philippines. Business-friendly environments made it easy to establish front companies and business ventures. The region’s banks were poorly regulated, with the exception of Singapore, and indeed Malaysia’s rush to position itself as a global center for Islamic banking proceeded far faster than regulatory and legal oversight. There are extensive hawala networks in the region as there are millions of Southeast Asians who work abroad. Thailand was

² Arquilla, “Networks, Netwar and Information-Age Terrorism,” 51.
⁴ Arquilla, “Networks, Netwar and Information-Age Terrorism,” 61.
a center of document forging. The region is awash in weapons. Central governments often do not exercise control over vast swaths of their territory. The second reason that Al Qaeda was attracted to Southeast Asia was that a small percentage of the population was becoming more influenced by a fundamentalist Islam and Wahhabism and Deobandism in particular. This has occurred gradually over time, but it is clear that political Islam is on the ascendency in Malaysia and Indonesia. There are many reasons for this, but they included economic disparities, a backlash to Westernization and globalization, the lack of political freedom and democracy, the failure of secular states and secessionist aspirations. Wahhabism’s introduction into the region can be explained by several factors: Gulf petro-dollars and Islamic charities funded mosque and school construction as well as other development assistance. Aid has been conditional on Wahhabi, not indigenous Sufi or moderate Suni teachings. More Southeast Asian students have studies in Middle Eastern Islamic universities and madrasas, in particular Egypt’s Al Azhar and Yemen’s AI Imam Universities, both of which espouse doctrinaire Wahhabism, as well as the Pakistani and Afghan madrasas that gave rise to Salafi movements such as the Taliban.

In addition to the schools established with Gulf money, were a number of schools established by returned Mujiheddin, veterans of the Afghan war against the Soviet Union. It cannot be emphasized enough how important the anti-Soviet war was. Although there were no more than 1,000 Southeast Asian jihadis, they returned to Southeast Asia, convinced of the righteousness of their cause, confident that they could defeat their own secular governments, with a taste of jihad, and important standing in their own communities. Al Qaeda was able to build on its personal relationships with veterans of the Mujiheddin in Afghanistan. Undeniably, the Afghanistan experience was the formative experience in the Southeast Asian jihadi’s lives. One can not underestimate the how important the Afghan connection is: it was the basis for the Al Qaeda network around the world. As Peter Bergen wrote:

Still, in the grand scheme of things the Afghan Arabs were no more than extras in the Afghan holy war. It was the lessons they learned from the jihad, rather than their contribution to it, that proved significant. They rubbed shoulders with militants from dozens of countries and were indoctrinated in the most extreme ideas concerning jihad. They received at least some sort of military training, and in some cases battlefield experiences. Those who had had their tickets punched in the Afghan conflict went back to their countries with the ultimate credential for later holy wars. And they believed their exertions had defeated a superpower.⁶

They returned home, confident that they could defeat their secular regimes. The leadership of almost every militant Islamic group in Southeast Asia, from the Kampulan Mujiheddin Malaysia, Jemaah Islamiya, Laskar Jihad, MILF, fought with the Mujiheddin. In Indonesia, there was the “Group of 272” of

⁶ Peter Bergen, Holy War Inc., 56.
returned veterans and the key leaders of radical groups in the region all are veterans of the Mujiheddin: Jaffar Umar Thalib, Hambali, Mohammed Iqbal Rahman, Nik Aziz Nik Adli, Abdurajak Janjalani, and others. By linking their domestic struggles with an international network, the leaders of these groups were able to pool and share resources, conduct joint training, assist each other in weapons and explosives procurement, identity laundering and financial transfers. By working internationally, domestic-oriented groups were better able to achieve their goals.

These jihadis returned to Southeast Asia and established a small network of madrasas, which espoused Wahhabism. The JI directly owned a number of madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and was affiliated with a number of others. The most important madrasa is the Al Mukmin school in Solo, Indonesia, but they also include the Al Tarbiyah Luqmanul Hakim school in Johor, Malaysia, the KMM’s Sekolah Menengah Arab Darul Anuar in Kota Baru Malaysia, Pesentren Hidayatullah in Balikpapan, Kalimantan, and Pesentren Darul Aman, in Gombara, Ujung Pandang, and the Al Islam School. These schools became the centers of recruiting, indoctrination and operations for the JI.

Whereas there were always Islamists in Southeast Asia, though a minority of the Muslim population, there were now jihadis, who were willing to resort to violence to bring about the establishment of Islamic states governed by sharia.

3. Al Qaeda’s Infrastructure
One of the aspects that made Southeast Asia so appealing to the Al Qaeda leadership in the first place was the network of Islamic charities, the spread of poorly-regulated Islamic banks, business-friendly environments, and economies that already had records of extensive money laundering. It is my contention that Al Qaeda saw the region, first and foremost, as a back office for their activities (especially to set up front companies, fundraise, recruit, forge documents, and purchase weapons), and only later became a theater of operations in its own right as its affiliate organization in Southeast Asia, the Jemaah Islamiya, developed its own capabilities.

It is Al Qaeda’s logistical network that allows Al Qaeda operatives, the JI and disparate groups to maintain their ties. Much of Al Qaeda’s funding is thought to come from charities, either unwittingly or intentionally siphoned off. This is possible as Al Qaeda inserted top operatives in Southeast Asia into leadership positions in several charities.

In Islamic culture, Muslims are expected to donate 2.5 percent of their net revenue to charity, known as zakat. There are some 200 private charities in Saudi Arabia alone, including 20 established by Saudi intelligence to fund the Mujiheddin that send some $250 million a year to Islamic causes abroad. The

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6 Muslims are required to pay 2.5 percent of their income in zakat (alms) each year. It is estimated that $1.6 million per day is donated by wealthy Saudis alone. During the war against the Soviets, the Saudis established three charities, the Islamic International Relief Organization, Al Hamaran Foundation and the Islamic Relief Agency. Al Qaeda has established many more since then. Mark Hubard, “Bankrolling Bin Laden,” Financial Times, 28 November 2001.

three most important of these are the Islamic International Relief Organization (IIRO), which is part of the Muslim World League, a fully Saudi state-funded organization, the al Haramain Islamic Foundation, also based in Saudi Arabia, and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. Although most of the money goes to legitimate charitable work, albeit to win support, such as, mosque construction, charities, cultural centers, and NGOs, much of the money is diverted to clandestine activities. Zakat taxes are common throughout Southeast Asia, indeed in late-2001, the Indonesian government agreed to make zakat tax deductible in order to encourage charitable donations. Yet unlike the West where NGO’s and charities are closely regulated and audited, they are almost completely unregulated in Southeast Asia, allowing for egregious financial mismanagement and the diversion of funds to terrorist cells. Bin Laden’s initial foray into the region came in the form of charities run by his brother-in-law in the Philippines, including a branch of the IIRO.

Khalifa established several other charities and Islamic organizations in the Philippines ostensibly for charity and religious work, which channeled money to extremist groups, including a branch office of the Saudi charity Mer-c International and two local NGOs, Islamic Wisdom Worldwide and the Daw’I Immam Al Shafee Center. He established Al-Maktum University in Zamboanga using funds from the IIRO. He also established a branch office of the IIRO in Zamboanga. According to the IIRO’s office in Saudi Arabia, its activities include an orphanage and dispensary in Cotabato City, dispensaries and pharmacies in Zamboanga. It provided food and clothing to internally displaced people who fled war zones. In addition, IIRO funding went to schools and scholarships. The IIRO asserted that it always did this if not in cooperation with the government, with at least official approval. Perhaps the most important NGO was the little known International Relations and Information Center. The IRIC engaged in numerous activities, for the most part philanthropic: livelihood projects, job training (carpentry, fish farming, farming), orphanages, Islamic schools and other social work. According to the Philippine National Security Advisor, Rollo Golez,

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8 The President of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth is Sheikh Saleh al-Sheikh, the Saudi Minister of Islamic Affairs. He is also the “superintendent of all foundation activities for Al Haramain. In March 2002, the United States froze the accounts of Al Haramain’s offices in Bosnia and Somalia. The Bosnian branch was re-opened in August 2002 under Saudi Pressure. See Matthew Levitt, “Combatting Terrorist Financing, Despite the Saudis,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch #673, 1 November 2002.

9 The IIRO was established in 1978 in Saudi Arabia as a non-governmental humanitarian organization. It has more than 30 offices, and its activities cover more than 75 countries in different parts of the world. It was used extensively by Saudi Arabian intelligence services to channel Saudi, American and Gulf-state funding to the Afghan Mujiheddin from 1979-1989. Basha, “Largest Islamic Relief Organization Maligned.”

10 Zubair immigrated to the Philippines in 1985 and married a local convert to Islam Shedha Enriquez. Abu Omar, Khalifa’s brother-in-law, started working at the IRIC in 1993, first as a “volunteer,” and becoming its director in 1994. The Chair of the IRIC was Dr. Zubair, described by Philippine intelligence as Khalifa’s “business partner.”

11 PNP, After Intelligence Operations Report.
Khalifa "built up the good will of the community through charity and then turned segments of the population into agents."\(^{13}\)

Yet, the IIRO quickly caught the interest of the Philippine police and military intelligence which saw it as a front organization for insurgent activities. "The IIRO which claims to be a relief institution is being utilized by foreign extremists as a pipeline through which funding for the local extremists are being coursed through," a Philippine intelligence report noted.\(^{14}\) An Abu Sayyaf defector acknowledged that "The IIRO was behind the construction of mosques, school buildings and other livelihood projects" but only "in areas penetrated, highly influenced and controlled by the Abu Sayyaf."\(^{15}\) For example, in Tawi Tawi, the director of the IIRO branch office was Abdul Asmad, thought to be the Abu Sayyaf's intelligence chief, before being killed on 10 June 1994. Scholarships, likewise, were given to students to become Islamic scholars. The defector said the IIRO was used by Bin Laden and Khalifa to distribute funds for the purchase of arms and other logistical requirements of the Abu Sayyaf and MILF: "Only 10 to 30 percent of the foreign funding goes to the legitimate relief and livelihood projects and the rest go to terrorist operations."\(^{16}\) The earliest financial dealings between the ASG and Khalifa date to 1991, when the group was founded.

The Philippine government asserts that all of the charities run by Khalifa in the Philippines, that were used to funnel money to the Abu Sayyaf group and the MILF, were shut down.\(^{17}\) The linkages between Khalifa and Yousef, and the fact that Wali Khan Amin Shah was supposedly an employee of the IIRO was too much for the Philippine authorities to countenance. Yet, complained one senior intelligence official to me, "we could not touch the IIRO."\(^{18}\) It took the Philippine government almost 6 years to shut their office in the Philippines, from 2000 until September 2001, the IIRO still funded projects in the country through its representative offices in Malaysia and Indonesia. The IRIC's operations and staff were taken over by another Islamic charity, the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission, headed by a close Khalifa associate Mohammed Amin al-Ghafari in 1995.\(^{19}\) The Daw'l Imam Al Shafee Center, likewise, remains operating.

In Indonesia, a similar development of charities as terrorist fronts occurred. JI and Al Qaeda leaders assumed leadership positions, often becoming regional branch chiefs, or formed alliances with several important Saudi-backed charities, including MERC, the IIRO and Al Haramain.

One of the most important charities in all of this was KOMPAK, an independent arm of the Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia, founded on 1 August

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\(^{15}\) Herrera, "Bin Laden Funds Abu Sayyaf Through Muslim Relief Group."
\(^{16}\) Herrera, "Bin Laden Funds Abu Sayyaf Through Muslim Relief Group."
\(^{18}\) Interview with a Major in the IS-AFP, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City, 24 January 2002.
\(^{19}\) Interview with a Colonel in the PNP-IS, Malate, 25 June 2002.
KOMPAK officials while acknowledging that they operate in regions struck by sectarian conflict (Aceh, Poso, Malukus, and Bangunan Beton Sumatra), they are there to alleviate the crises and provide necessary relief. They denied any links to "jihad activities." "We never give our money to the Mujiheddin or terrorists. We give our money to the needy, unemployed of the ummah." This assertion should be taken guardedly. Without a doubt KOMPAK has been involved in charitable work, especially food distribution. Yet the former chairman of KOMPAK’s South Sulawesi office was Agus Dwikarna, and the head of the Jakarta was Tamsil Linrung. One of Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s top lieutenants Aris Munadar, suspected of purchasing much of the explosives for the bombings across the region on the anniversary of 9/11, was the head of KOMPAK. hen asked about that, the Secretary of KOMPAK stated, “What he does outside of KOMPAK is not our responsibility.” Yet, KOMPAK also produced propaganda and recruitment videos for Dwikarna’s paramilitary group the Laskar Jundullah, emphasizing both their military strength and sense of Muslim persecution.

In addition to these senior KOMPAK officials being arrested for or detained on suspicion of terrorism, KOMPAK has joint projects with important Saudi Charities, notably, the IIRO, Al Haramain, and MERC, often serving as their executor agency.

Again, a similar cast of characters emerges, with overlapping leadership. Agus Dwikarna was the local representative of the Saudi Charity Al Haramain in Makassar in South Sulawesi, which Faruq admitted was the largest single source of Al Qaeda funds into Indonesia.

Sheik Bandar, the head of Al Haramain, kept a second wife in Surabaya, in east Java, and brought in significant amounts of cash for JI- which was delivered through Ahmed al-Moudi, the head of Al Haramain’s Jakarta office.

Dwikarna was also a branch officer of a Saudi Arabian charity Al Haramain Foundation, a major conduit of Al Qaeda funding to Southeast Asia. Al-Faruq lived near Agus Dwikarna in Makassar (Ujung Pandang) in South Sulawesi and was the key backer of Dwikarna’s Laskar Jundullah. Al-Faruq also worked closely with Ahmed al-Moudi, the head of the Al Haramain Foundation office in

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20 The Dewan Dakwah is one of Indonesia’s most important Islamic social organizations that was founded in February 1967.
21 Interview with Dr. H. Asep R. Jayanegara, Secretary, Komite Penanggulangan Krisis, Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia, Jakarta, 8 January 2003.
22 Dwikarna was also the head of the Dewan Dakwa Islam Indonesia, South Sulawesi branch. Dewan Dakwah founded KOMPAK (the Committee to Alleviate the Impact of Crisis). KOMPAK had very close ties with the Saudi Charity Medical Emergency Rescue Committee. Omar al-Faruq admitted to sending large amounts of aid through KOMPAK to Ambon and Poso.
23 BIN Interrogation Report of Omar al-Faruq (June 2002). The office was in Makassar, Sulawesi.
24 Dwikarna, a civil engineer, has admitted to being 4th in command of the MMI in Indonesia. In addition, he has admitted to being a member of Laskar Jundullah and a chapter head of Dewan Dakwah Islamiya. Linrung also admitted to being a member of the DDI, and the former treasurer of the National Mandate Party (PAN) before quitting the post in January 2002. The DDI is linked to the former ruling Golkar party. Belfas was a manager of a mining firm.
25 Al Faruq organized training for the Laskar Jundullah at WAFA facilities and then at the Hidayatullah Islamic school both in Balikpapan, Kalimantan.
Jakarta, and the head of Al Haramain, a Saudi named Sheikh Bandar was a frequent visitor to Indonesia, as he kept a wife in Surabaya.

In the investigation of Seyam Reda, a man officials believe to be the most senior Al Qaeda financier in Southeast Asia, a former Islamic charity official in Bosnia in the mid- to late-1990s, further links to al Haramain and KOMPAK were uncovered. Reda was responsible for the production of "documentaries" used for propaganda, fundraising and recruiting purposes, similar to what he did in the 1990s in Bosnia. These documentaries featured two JI paramilitary's Abu Jibril's Laskar Mujiheddin and Agus Dwikarna's Laskar Jundullah. He was also linked to another charity, the Komite Zakat Infaq Dan Shadoqoh ISNET, which solicits most of its donations from Indonesians living overseas.

Three Indonesia-based Islamic fundamentalists, Abdul Hadi, Syawal Yasin (Abdullah Sungkar's son in law and now the head of the Laskar Jundullah) and Rida were connected to WAFA, an NGO based in Herat, Afghanistan, had gone to Kalimantan to establish a training school for terrorists, at the Hidayatullah madrasa.

The infrastructure that Al Qaeda established in the region includes not just charities, but also corporate entities. The modus operandi of so many Al Qaeda cells was that they were given some seed money and additional funds, most cells were expected to become self sustaining over time. Southeast Asia, the fastest growing region in the world in the early- to mid-1990s, had business friendly environments and encouraged the profusions of firms and general trading companies. Two different types of firms were established. The most important were front companies- corporate entities that were established with a minimum amount of capital investments, that generated few if any profits, and whose primary purpose was to purchase materials or cloak other aspects of terrorist operations. The second type of company were those that were given Al Qaeda funds for start up capitalization, but their primary purpose was for revenue generation.

The most important front companies were established by JI's Malaysian cell to channel Al Qaeda funds and procure weapons and bomb-making materiel. They were established at a rate of approximately one a year between 1993-1996. These include two general trading companies, a bio-medical lab and a computer firm. Most had overlapping board membership.

Green Laboratory Medicine SDN BHD, established on 6 October 1993.
- Director was Yazid Sufaat, a former Malaysian army captain who studied bio-chemistry at California state university in the 1980s. He was reproached by his family for his loss of Islamic values while abroad, and began attending prayer sessions when he came into contact with a militant preacher Riduan Isamuddin, aka Hambali. Hambali, who will be discussed in detail below, was in charge of setting up a large Al Qaeda cell in the region, the Jemaah Islamiya, and recruited Sufaat. He was sent to Pakistan for religious training when he was recruited into Al Qaeda/JI. In June 2001 Sufaat traveled to Afghanistan where he was trained by Al Qaeda. He was arrested in
mid-September 2001, when he tried to return to Malaysia from Afghanistan.

- This firm was charged with purchasing 21 tons of ammonium nitrate to be used in terrorist attacks in Singapore. At the time of his arrest he had already purchased and dispatched 4 tons that remains unaccounted for. Ammonium nitrate, a chemical fertilizer is readily available in Malaysia where one ton costs approximately S$400-500.

- Yazid Sufaat’s Kuala Lumpur apartment was used by the Al Qaeda lieutenants in January 2000 to plan the attacks on the USS Cole and September 11.

**Konsojaya SDN, BHD, established in 1994**

- Konsojaya was a trading company that ostensibly exported Malaysian palm oil to Afghanistan and honey imports from Sudan and Yemen-important Al Qaeda business networks.

- The firm was capitalized with RM100,000, and 5,998 of the shares were controlled by Wali Khan and Shabana. Konsojaya’s original board of directors included:

  Wali Khan Amin Shah  
  Medhat Abdul Salam Shabana  
  Riduan bin Isumuddin (Hambali)  
  Hemeid H. Alghamdi  
  Noralwizah Lee Binti Abdullah (Hambali’s wife)  
  Amein Mohammed  
  Amein Alsanani (Managing Director)  
  Annamalai A/L Sundrasan (Secretary)

- At a later date, a new five-member board was elected, and did not include Hambali, his wife or Amein Mohammed.

- Konsojaya played an important role in Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s Oplan Bojinka, an attempt to simultaneously destroy 11 US jetliners over the pacific in 1995.

**Infocus Technology SDN BHD, established on 13 July 1995**

- Another firm established by Yazid Sufaat.

- Infocus technology hired Zacarias Moussaoui as a marketing consultant and was able to get him a visa to the United States. Infocus was to pay Moussaoui a lump sum of $35,000 and then a monthly stipend of $2,500.26 Yazid Sufaat has told Malaysian investigators that the money was actually never paid. Moussaoui was in Malaysia twice, first in September 2000 and then October 2000.

- There Moussaoui hoped to enter flight school, but was disappointed when he could not receive jumbo jet training and decided to go to America for training.

Secure Valley SDN BHD, established on 4 October 1996

- A general trading company. Little is known about its purpose or operations, but it has many of the same boards of directors as the other 3 JI-linked firms.

In the Philippines, Ramzi Yousef and Wali Khan Amin Shah established another shell company, the Bermuda Trading Company, as a cover to purchase chemicals. Most of the chemicals were imported, probably from Singapore.

Front companies were not the only businesses established by Al Qaeda. There are also cases in which JI members established businesses, received contracts and businesses from JI supporters and then plowed the proceeds back into the organization. The Al Risalah Trading Company of Malaysia, is one such example. The Al Risalah Trading Company was established by the son-in-law of Abdullah Sungkar, Feri Muchlis bin Abdul Halim, with some RM25,000 in startup capital. Hami, a 46-year-old, was an Indonesian with permanent residency in Malaysia. His firm obtained a coveted license that allowed it to contend for government contracts. To that end, it had been awarded contracts to install water pipes in Selangor, to provide stationary for a school, and had just received a contract to build two schools in Selangor. In the first two cases the person who accepted the tender was a suspected member of Jemaah Islamiya; and both have been detained under the draconian ISA. Halim was arrested in 17 April 2002, for suspected involvement in JI and the KMM.

Through the MMI, but linked to the JI are several Indonesian-based publishing houses and video production companies. The most important of these is the Hidyatullah press based in Yogyakarta, which is run by Irfan S. Awwas, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s right hand man and the head of the MMI.

4. The Nature of Linkages between the Jemaah Islamiya and Al Qaeda

There has been considerable debate in the region over the extent to which the JI is affiliated with Al Qaeda. Indeed Indonesian police chief D’ai Bachtar recently dismissed any such links between the two. JI must be seen as an integral part of Al Qaeda. Whereas Al Qaeda has established its own network of independent cells in the region, the JI is an important arm of the organization. Although there is no evidence that JI members pledged bayat to Osama bin Laden, indeed all members of the JI pledged Bayat to Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, the organization is very much at Al Qaeda’s disposal. The relationship is at many levels, and they should dispel doubt about the connection between the two groups.

First, there is a considerable amount of overlapping membership. The JI’s chief of operations Hambali, was revealed to be a member of Al Qaeda’s shura, its top decision-making body. Along with Abu Zubaadah, Hambali was one of the only non-Arabs on the shura. To be sure, Hambali is not a member of bin Laden’s inner circle, but his inclusion clearly signals the organization’s desire to establish a global network. With the arrest of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in March 2003, Hambali’s importance to the organization became all the more central.
The second important piece of evidence came from the interrogation of Omar al-Faruq. Al Faruq, was a senior Al Qaeda official in the region. Recruited into the organization in the early 1990s, from 1992-1995, he trained in camps in Afghanistan, himself becoming a trainer. In 1995 he was dispatched to an MILF camp in the Philippines where he trained JI members. In late-1998 to early-1999, he was dispatched to Indonesia, where he relied heavily on the Jemaah Islamiya network. Al Faruq relied not just on JI personnel for his operations, but he has indicated that he even worked through Ba'asyir to plan all operations.

Al Qaeda has also played a significant role in the training of JI members. As mentioned above, Omar al Faruq, along with al Mughira al Gaza'iri, an Al Qaeda camp commander, were dispatched by Abu Zubaydah to the Philippines to train JI and MILF operatives. Likewise, Fathur Rohman al Ghozi, himself after being recruited into Al Qaeda, was dispatched back to the region where he also conducted bomb-making training in MILF camps.

One of the interesting mysteries of the Bali attack is that two days before the attack, a Yemeni, Syafullah, entered the country on a false American passport and left immediately before the attacks. Although many Muslim conspiracy theorists in Indonesian believed that the bomb was too large and beyond the technical proficiency of those who were arrested, one official explained to me that the bomb was easily constructed and required no more expertise than a smaller one, what was complex was calculating the power of the detonator, and that the Al Qaeda operator was believed to have flown in at the last minute to complete the bomb. Al Qaeda continues to provide technological assistance to JI members, clearly evident in the increasing size and lethality of their bombs.

One of Al Faruq's most important roles was establishing a financial conduit between Al Qaeda and the JI. Another important tie, and this would become a modus operandi of Al Qaeda, was his marriage to the daughter of Haris Fadilah a senior JI official and a leader of the JI's Laskar Mujiheddin, a 500-man paramilitary group that was engaged in sectarian conflict in the Malukus.

Third, following the arrests in Singapore and Malaysia in December 2001 and January 2002, Hambali organized an important meeting in Thailand to apprise the JI’s position and ability to conduct terrorist operations. Among those who attended the meeting was a Canadian-Kuwaiti, Mohammed Mansour Jabarah. Although he had spent time in the region in the fall of 2001, when he and Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi were conducting a final round of surveillance against targets in Singapore, he was sent to Hambali's January meeting to represent one of the most senior officials, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

This is not unusual. The January 2000 lieutenants meeting in Kuala Lumpur, is telling. Senior Al Qaeda officials came to the region because they believed that they were safe. The meeting was held in the apartment of a JI member and several JI members were present.

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Another piece of evidence regarding the inter-operability between the groups was the planned suicide bombing of a US naval ship making a port call in Singapore. Although the JI Singapore cell was charged with conducting the surveillance, planning the attack, and constructing the bomb, the operation was not be conducted by an Al Qaeda team flown in for the operation. In a similar operation a Somali Al Qaeda operative, Ghalib, sought to recruit locals to assist him in a suicide attack on US naval vessels in Surabaya in May 2002.

Sixth, the relationship between JI members and Al Qaeda seem to be cemented through an almost feudal arrangement based on marriage. For example, Mohammed Jamal Khalifa was able to penetrate the radical Muslim community and establish a close working relationship with the MILF through his marriage to the sister of Abu Omar, a Marawi-based Muslim student activist with links to the MILF. Hambali’s marriages to Malaysian and Cambodian women allowed him to further develop ties to those communities. Omar al Faruq was able to develop close ties to the JI through his marriage to Mira Augustina, the 24-year old daughter of a Jemaah Islamiya operative names Haris Fadillah (AKA Abu Dazar), who was killed in the Malukus on 26 October 2000.

The link between a Spanish Al Qaeda cell, led by Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas (Abu Dada) and his Indonesian lieutenant Parlindigan Siregar, and Al Qaeda training camps in Poso, again raises serious concerns. There is evidence that foreign jihadis were involved in the conflicts in both the Malukus and Poso, Sulawesi.

Finally, we need to raise an issue that that is truly demanding further study, the JI’s relationship to Al Qaeda cells in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the radical Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI), founded in 1992, is led by an associate of Osama bin Laden, Fazlul Rahman. The organization is closely tied to one of the Al-Qaeda linked groups in Pakistan/Kashmir. Fazlul Rahman signed Osama bin Laden’s 23 February 1998 declaration of holy war on the United States. Harakat has recruited from Bangladesh’s 60,000 madrasas and is now believed to have over 15,000 followers.

Fazlul Rahman’s HuJI also actively recruited Burmese Rohingyas and sent them to fight in Kashmir, Afghanistan and Chechnya. There are some 200,000 Rohingyas in Bangladesh. The largest Rohingya organization in Bangladesh is the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), established in the early 1980s, which has a large training camp in Ukhia, Southeast of Cox’s Bazaar. The militant group has actively recruited from among the destitute community and in the 1980s sent volunteers to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets. Bertil Lintner found that the RSO had maintained close links and received material support from other South Asian militant organizations including the Hizb-e-Islami in Afghanistan, the Hizb-ul-Mujiheddin in Kashmir, and the Jamaat-e-Islami in

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28 Haris was a veteran of the Afghan Mujheddin, and the head of Abu Jibril’s Laskar Mujheddin forces in the Malukus
political liability of being “Islamic fundamentalists.” They made a show of withdrawing some 300 troops from Ambon, though a fraction of the total number there. Even if they disband their paramilitary, the parent organization, the Forum Komunikasi wal Sunnah wal Jamaah will not be disbanded. They have offices in 70 cities around the country. They operate several large madrasas and other organizations that espouse an intolerant brand of Salafi and Wahhabi Islam. Indeed, Thalib announced that he wanted to focus on his students. The Forum Komunikasi owns businesses, fund raises, and publishes a weekly newspaper. They are not going to relinquish this critical infrastructure even if they disband some of their paramilitary. They will lay low, rename themselves, re-emerge, bringing jihad, intolerance and sectarian violence.

The fact is the Laskar Jihad and Al Qaeda share a similar world view, sense of persecution against Muslims and commitment to jihad. The Laskar Jihad may not be a constituent of Al Qaeda but that does not mean that its members do not have a shared ideology or are not susceptible to Al Qaeda’s calls for action and propaganda.

7. Al Qaeda as an Ideology
Since the American invasion of Afghanistan, the routing of the Taliban and the dispersion of Al Qaeda, the organization has been less able to effective execute attacks. Indeed, Ayman Al Zawahiri’s fall 2002 statement that Al Qaeda would begin targeting American economic interests was indicative of a weakened organization, less able to carry out massive, highly coordinated attacks against hardened and symbolic targets. The arrests, loss of training camps, and the increased surveillance and pressure by governments has made Al Qaeda a less potent adversary. This is not to suggest that Al Qaeda has been defeated; it is biding its time, rebuilding its network. Al Qaeda attacks what it has the capabilities to attack at any given time. Al Qaeda is down but not out.

But there is also another possibility, and one that is quite alarming: that Al Qaeda is being transformed from an organization to an ideology. Are we missing the point by focusing so much on Al Qaeda the organization? It was always a fluid organization, with some 40 constituent groups and tactical allies.

Al Qaeda represented a new kind of terrorism: not a secular or ideologically based organization that had limited political goals. Al Qaeda was truly a global network. Will the organization morph into something new. Will arms of Al Qaeda metastasize into their own networks. Invention is difficult; but replicating and improving on an idea is far easier.

Could Al Qaeda become an ideology in Southeast Asia? The answer is a disturbing “yes.”

The first place we should start is for security specialists, journalists and academics to go back and revisit the sectarian conflicts in the Malukus and Sulawesi. This was a generation’s Afghanistan. Although it will never have the religious and political symbolism of the Afghan jihad, it was their jihad, their first taste of blood, of war in god’s name. It was the formative experience of their life. There were some 4,000 people who fought in the Malukus and Poso (3,000

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37 Interview with Umar Jafar Thalib, Jakarta, 10 January 2002.
Bin Laden, who met Thalib in 1987, offered funding for Laskar Jihad, but Thalib turned it down, though the Ambonese Laskar Mujiheddin did not. Thalib, explains that he turned it down because he questioned bin Laden's piety. Indeed there is evidence that much of the Laskar Jihad's funding came from within the TNI.

Laskar Jihad however is unclear about its funding. The author has witnessed fund-raisers shaking people down in the streets of Central and Eastern Java. Yet the Laskar Jihad's web page, provides account details for an account at the Bank of Central Asia, Indonesia's largest bank, to which wire transfers can be made from anywhere in the world. One Laskar Jihad fundraiser stated in an interview that the average donation is about Rp70,000 ($6.60) about half of the cost of sending a fighter to the Malukus.

Most alarming have been recent reports about an audit of the Indonesian armed forces that indicate that of a missing $20 million dollars, $9.3 million had been funneled directly to Thalib and the Laskar Jihad. Increasingly there is more evidence that Thalib’s assertion that the Laskar Jihad is a home grown, locally funded movement is a sheer lie, and that his organization exists because of covert aid from Islamists within the Indonesian military and from the Al Qaeda network.

In the immediate aftermath of the 11 September attacks, the Indonesian government put an inordinate amount of pressure on the country's most visible Islamic extremist group the Laskar Jihad to not take advantage of the attacks and mobilize its supporters for a jihad against the Americans. The military increased its presence in the Maluku Islands where Laskar Jihad supported sectarian violence had killed some 9,000 people. And the Laskar Jihad leader, Jafar Umar Thalib, went to great pains to distance himself from Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network, though he had never previously done so. “Laskar Jihad does not have ties with Al Qaeda or any other organizations that are associated with Osama bin Laden or any form or part of his network. Laskar Jihad distances itself from Osama bin Laden and his followers.” And Thalib has suddenly gone out of his way to distance himself from bin Laden, now asserting that bin Laden is “very empty about the knowledge of religion.”

Yet Thalib has acknowledged that he maintains links with Malaysia’s Kampulan Mujiheddin (KMM) and Thalib has coordinated his operations in Indonesia with Abu Bakar Ba’asyir. Indeed the Laskar Jihad attends and is a member of Ba’asyir’s umbrella organization, the Mujiheddin Council of Indonesian. There is evidence that Laskar Jihad forces were involved in street fights with JI’s paramilitary groups, the Laskar Jundullah and Laskar Mujiheddin.

On 16 October 2002, days after the terrorist bomb attack in Bali left nearly 200 people killed, the Laskar Jihad announced that it was disbanding. This announcement should be met with considerable suspension and seen as a PR tactic. The Laskar Jihad knows when to lay low. Following 9/11, they were one of the most reticent Islamic groups in the country. Now they understand the

35 www.laskarjihad.org.
36 Caragata, “Radical Blasts.”
armed by weapons primarily supplied by the Philippine JI cell, procured from the MILF.

In February 2003, Philippine armed forces overran an MILF camp and captured a large number of documents that provide evidence that Al Qaeda still maintains close ties with the organization. Philippine intelligence officials with whom I have spoken, believe there are still 12-17 Al Qaeda members fighting with the MILF.

One thing that Al Qaeda did so well in Southeast Asia, was it got groups such as the MILF, which had primarily national-agendas to think and act internationally. Al Qaeda was an important matchmaker and was able to convince organizations of the benefits of linking up to an international network.

6. A Shared World View
The Laskar Jihad is one of the best examples of Al Qaeda's influence, and its ability to find common cause. Although there is considerable suspicion that the Laskar Jihad is linked to Al Qaeda, there is nothing more than circumstantial evidence to support it.

Founded in January 2000 at a Yogyakarta football stadium, Umar Jafar Thalib was able to mobilize a small army to wage a jihad in the Maluku islands. Arguing that there was an international campaign to create a Christian republic in the heart of Indonesia, by May he sent several hundred fighters to the Malukus armed with machetes and crude weapons, “so that they could feel safe in their own country.” Not by coincidence, Osama bin Laden had mentioned East Timor in his 1998 Fatwa, and there was a shared sense that never could the radical Muslims allow a Islamic state to be broken up. This explains the ferocity of the fighting in the Malukus. The influx of the Laskar Jihad paramilitary tipped the balance in favor of the Muslims, and shortly thereafter Christians were ethnically cleansed from Ternate the North Maluku capital. In all some 9,000 people died in the Maluku strife.

For the purposes of this report, there is a greater concern about the rise of the Laskar Jihad: The Maluku conflict served to attract radical Islamicists from around the Muslim world. For example, 7 Afghans arrived in Ambon on 7 July 2000 and were spirited away by Laskar Jihad forces. They joined some 200 other Afghan, Pakistani and Malays. But its not just individuals, but financial support. According to the Darul Islam's Al Chaidar, “They maintain contact with the international Mujiheddin network, including Osama bin Laden’s group.” “Wherever a jihad is in force, this network provides money and weapons and all tools needed for the jihad, and they mobilize fighters to go to the jihad area,” Mr. Chaidar said. “This is exactly what is happening in the Malukus. Osama bin Laden is one of those who have sent money and weapons to jihad fighters in the Malukus.” Abu Abdul Aziz and one other bin Laden lieutenant were dispatched to Ambon in the height of the Laskar Jihad's jihad.

33 "Indonesia: Overcoming Murder and Chaos in Maluku," ICG Asia Report No. 10 (December 2000).
Bangladesh. Over 100 RSO fighters trained with the Hizb-e-Islami in Afghanistan, and Afghan trainers have come to RSO camps, which in the 19990s were taken over by Fazlul Rahman's HujI.

The JI’s attempt to form alliances with other radical groups in the region, the Rabitatul Mujiheddin, included the Rohinga Solidarity Organization. Moreover, there is a growing body of evidence that JI members, including Hambali, have sought refuge in Bangladesh, whose government has done little to crack down on the militants.

5. The Nature of Linkages between the MILF and Al Qaeda

In many ways it is counter-intuitive that Al Qaeda and the MILF have become close allies. The MILF was established in 1978 (formally in 1984) when it broke away from the MNLF for being too secular. It is an Islamic organization, though its ultimate goal is to establish an independent state in the Muslim dominated southern Philippine province of Mindanao.

Since its inception, the MILF had received most of its funding and weaponry from the Libyan government. But the MILF was always concerned about the reliability of state-support, especially as the Libyan government had played such an important role, dating back to 1976, in brokering the Tripoli accords between the government of the Philippines and the MNLF.

In return for the aid, which the MILF increasingly relied on following Libya’s 1996 role in bringing about the peace accord between the MNLF and the Government, the MILF allowed JI operatives to use their secure base areas for training. Indeed, except for a brief period in 1999 when it was overtaken by government forces, there was a separate camp within the MILF’s camp for the JI. Several Al Qaeda trainers, including Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi, Omar al-Faruq and al-Mughira al-Gaza’iri, an Al Qaeda camp commander were dispatched to the MILF’s base, Camp Abu Bakar, in central Mindanao by Abu Zubaydah. Indeed, the MILF set up a camp within the camp simply to house and train the JI operatives, Camp Hudaibie.

As Al Qaeda lost their 40 camps in Afghanistan and a number of training camps, including seven in Indonesia and two in Malaysia, have been shut down, one of the most critical factors in securing the JI’s future is the ability to continue training a new generation of operatives at Camp Abu Bakar. The MILF has pledged that it will arrest any JI members found in its territory, but this must be met with a high degree of suspicion.

The MILF has done more than simply provide space and support for training JI operatives; much of the JI’s materiel has come from MILF stockpiles and sources. For example, the 1 ton of explosives that Fathur Rohman al Ghozi led investigators to came from the MILF’s supplier, Hussein Ramos. Likewise, the JI’s two paramilitaries, the Laskar Jundullah and the Laskar Mujiheddin, were

Laskar Jihad and approximately 1,000 Laskar Mujiheddin and Laskar Jundullah). That is four times the number of all Southeast Asian who fought against the Soviets? Where are they now? Are they setting up their own radical *madrasas*? Recruiting? Preparing for their next jihad? Forming networks and trans-border alliances? This group of individuals is a potential time bomb. I find it thoroughly disturbing that the MMI, an overt civil society organization, is distributing books on guerilla warfare and translations of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam’s memoir of the Afghan jihad.

But Al Qaeda can be an ideology for individuals in the region as a whole. Osama bin Laden has become a romanticized figure. Although few Indonesians support his means, or even his ends, most believe that he is a brave man, a defender of Muslim causes. Moreover, with the economies in the region still not fully recovered from the Asian Economic Crisis, the socio-economic conditions for recruitment into radical groups exist. Poverty does not cause terrorism, but it does provide the conditions for it to spread. With some 40 million un-employed Indonesians alone, not to mention all the under-employed persons, radical groups will find fertile ground for recruiting.

The ongoing crisis in the Middle East, a world away from Southeast Asia, has become a metaphor for injustice in the region, and has led to anti-virulent Americanism by some strata. War in Iraq, likewise, would be the final confirmation for many Muslims in Southeast Asia that the Americans really are fighting Islam, not terrorism or proliferation, especially as they juxtapose Washington’s response to North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction program. War against Iraq would put millions of people on the streets across the region for sustained periods, which would put inordinate political pressure on their governments to curtail cooperation with the Unite States on the war on terror. War against Iraq, in other words would lead to a growth in popular support for radical Muslim causes, diminish support on behalf of secular nationalists for America, and potentially lead to less cooperation by regional governments in counter-terrorism efforts.

8. Conclusion

Al Qaeda’s success in Southeast Asia was not just in setting up a number of cells, but their ability to graft onto or co-opt indigenous groups and radicals, or form strong working alliances. In addition, and perhaps its lasting legacy, is that Al Qaeda has inspired a new generation of Muslim radicals. Al Qaeda is morphing into an ideology; it has paved the way and shown what is possible. It has proven that a sub-state actor can effectively challenge a secular state.

Southeast Asia is still home to very secular and moderate Muslims, who eschew the violence and radicalism associated with Al Qaeda and other Middle-Eastern and South Asian militant groups. But the number who have a similar world view, senses of injustice and intolerance, and conviction that a militant *jihad* are necessary to bring about their social, political and economic vision are growing steadily. Islam, across the region, long marginalized, is becoming more politicized. Al Qaeda, in its current form, or as it develops, will continue to find fertile ground in the region.