



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH

A Centre of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

Suicide Bombing at the Police Mosque in Cirebon, Indonesia

The Incident

A bomb exploded at the Adz-Zikro Mosque located in the compound of Cirebon City Police Headquarter in West Java, Indonesia. It exploded on 15 April 2011 at around 12.20 p.m. local time after the Friday prayer sermon ended and when the Friday prayer was just starting. A man, believed to be the carrier of the bomb died and 30 people, mostly police officers, were wounded in the explosion. The wounded officers included the Cirebon Police Chief Adj. Comr Herukoco, Cirebon Police Chief of Training and Security Suhadi, and Cirebon Police's Intelligence Chief, Singgih.¹ The mosque's windows and ceilings were mildly damaged. The victims were immediately brought to Pertamina, Labuhan, and Bhayangkara Hospital. Approximately two hours after the incident, the police's bomb-defusal unit, Gegana, arrived at the scene.²

Tactics

Police were the target of the bombing. A large majority of the congregation attending the Friday Prayers at the Cirebon Police Mosque are police. It seems that the perpetrator targeted police officers particularly the Cirebon Police Chief Adj. Comr Herukoco. Eyewitnesses have said that the bombers were not inside the mosque during the Friday sermons. When the Friday prayer was just about to begin, the suicide bomber made his way forward to second row of the congregation, close to the Cirebon Police Chief who was standing in the first row. The bomber then opened his jacket and the bomb exploded. The first row of the Friday prayer congregation was occupied by police officers.³

¹ "Breaking News: Bomb Explodes in West Java Mosque, Killing 1", *The Jakarta Globe* (<http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/breaking-news-bomb-explodes-in-west-java-mosque-killing-1/435586>, 15 Apr. 2011), 15 Apr. 2011; "Tubuh Pelaku Bom Bunuh Diri Hancur", *Kompas* (<http://regional.kompas.com/read/2011/04/15/13483466/Tubuh.Pelaku.Bom.Bunuh.Diri.Hancur>, 15 Apr. 2011)

² "Tim Gegana Langsung Lakukan Olah TKP", *Kompas* (<http://regional.kompas.com/read/2011/04/15/15123362/Tim.Gegana.Langsung.Lakukan.Olah.TKP>, 15 Apr. 2011)

³ "Pengebom Masjid Cirebon Menerobos Saat Takbir Pertama", *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/hukum/2011/04/15/brk.20110415-327732.id.html>, 15 Apr. 2011)



The Cirebon Police Chief is injured by sharpnel

Source: Tempo Interaktif

The suicide bomber – dressed in black, wearing a waist bag and a five-layer cloth – died instantly at the scene with his stomach damaged badly. The bomb was tied in the upper right of his stomach. His face, foot, and hand remain intact. Initial findings revealed that the fair-skinned man bomber was between 20-25 years old and approximately 170 cm tall. The police indicated that the bomb is a low explosive type as it did not result in massive victims. Most of the victims were injured by nails, bolts and nuts.

The Head of the National Intelligence Agency Sutanto said “the foot soldier is new but comes from the old network with an old modus operandi. The network has the old figure with capacity to influence the masses and recruit new people”.⁴ The suicide bombings are tactics that had been used by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Noordin Mohammed Top’s faction in the Bali I (2002) and Bali II (2005), 2003 J.W. Marriott Bombing, 2004 Australian Embassy Bombing, and the 2009 J.W. Marriott and Ritz-Carlton. In terms of bomb signature, Noordin’s faction had used nails, ball bearings, nuts and bolts to cause maximum carnage in its bomb packages during past attacks.⁵ Noordin’s network had targeted the West in Jakarta and Bali, as bombings in those places would easily garner international attention. Police are also not the target of Noordin’s faction despite JI had attacked police in Poso – where Muslim-Christian communal conflict occurred in 2000-2002 – in many occasions between 2003-2007.

⁴ “Pelaku Bom Cirebon Baru, Jaringan dan Modus Lama”, *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/hukum/2011/04/15/brk,20110415-327790.id.html>, 15 Apr. 2011)

⁵ “Jakarta’s Latest Bombing Mastermind Point to Nurdin Top”, *Nusantara News* (<http://www.nusantara-news.com/2009/07/jakartas-latest-bombing-mastermind-point-to-nurdin-top.html>, 19 Jul. 2009); “Jakarta Blasts Renew Security Fears”, *The Wall Street Journal* (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124792371212662071.html>, 19 Jul. 2009)



The suicide bomber

Source: Tempo Interaktif

In 2010, the jihadists – including JI – have increasingly targeted the police more following the discovery of a jihadi military training camp in Aceh in early 2010 and subsequent arrests and killings against leaders and participants of the training camps. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the spiritual leader of JI and leader of Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT), is currently on trial for heading the Aceh military training camp. Ten police officers were killed by the terrorists in 2010 alone, most of them were killed during fire fights including when the terrorist attack a police post in Medan. Two of them were shot in Kebumen and Purworejo in Central Java by a group tied to JAT.

The crackdown of the training camps has resulted in large numbers of fatalities from the terrorist side, in which 16 terrorists were killed, including the most wanted JI fugitive, Dulmatin. This has been considered the largest number of terrorists killed in counter terrorism operations in a year. As a result, the discourse on *qisas* (retaliation) to take revenge against the police, which is also seen as the extension of the U.S., was prevalent in many Indonesian jihadi websites and blogs. Another factor that has contributed to increasing attacks against the police has been outlined by Aman Abdurrahman the radical cleric who had inspired the establishment of the Aceh training camp. Aman Abdurrahman has been convicted to nine years of imprisonment. According to him, anyone who obstructs the implementation of shariah – including police – should be targeted.

The Cirebon bombing is the first time that the modus operandi of attacks against the police had employed JI and Noordin Top's tactic of suicide bombing. Shooting was typically used as a tactic in targeted assassinations against police such as those conducted in Poso and Central Java. Terrorism analyst Mardigu said that observing the bombing technique, there is a possibility that the Afghanistan alumni or students of the deceased JI bomb-maker Dr. Azahari were responsible. Two notable Azahari's students, Taufik Bulaga and Reno remain at large.

The prevalence of bomb-making manuals on the internet including magazines such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's magazine titled "INSPIRE" had in its first edition published a section on making a bomb using common items found in the kitchen of any home. This was then translated into Bahasa and circulated on the jihadi websites, blog, and forum since November 2010. The manual (with pictures) detailed the use of nails to be glued in the surface of the iron pipe as shrapnel to increase the deadly effect of the bomb.

Not the First Terrorist Attacks Targeting Mosques

While this is not the first terrorist attack to have occurred in mosques in Indonesia, it is the first suicide attack in a mosque in Indonesia. While Abu Bakar Ba'asyir said that mujahid never bombed a mosque regardless his targets, Umar Al-Faruq's (Al-Qaeda's point man in Southeast Asia) confession to CIA as revealed in the TIME magazine said that Ba'asyir was the planner of the 1999 Jakarta's Istiqlal Bombing.⁶ However, it has never been proven that Ba'asyir masterminded the attack against the biggest mosque in Indonesia. Indonesia Islam Mujahideen Batch (AMIN) subsequently claimed responsibility for the Istiqlal Mosque bombing, which injured four people including two marriage counselors working at the mosque. The head of AMIN was involved in the creation of the Abu Bakar Battalion. The Abu Bakar Battalion was designed as fighting unit to assist Muslims in Ambon. Some of Abu Bakar Battalion members were subsequently trained in Mindanao and developed links to jihadi groups.⁷

Additionally, there were attempted bombings against mosques in Indonesia. The perpetrators of the attempted bombing at the Kauman Great Mosque in Yogyakarta in 1999 were only arrested following the 2005 Tentena Market Bombing in Poso. The three are the alumni of MILF's Abu Bakar Camp in Mindanao, Southern Philippine where JI members were trained.⁸ On 26 February last year, an active bomb was found in the Great Mosque of Ciptra Rasa Kasepuhan Palace in Cirebon, the same city where the current bombing took place. The homemade bomb had been planned to explode during the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday in the Kasepuhan Palace. The bomb had not exploded as the wires in the circuitry of the bomb were not properly connected. Nails, nuts, and bolts were not found in this bomb. The perpetrator of this bomb was never found. The latest attempted bombing occurred in the Syuhada Mosque – built in 1952 by Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, the former ruler of Yogyakarta – in Yogyakarta on 23

⁶ "Ba'asyir: Enggak Boleh 'Ngebom' Masjid", *Kompas* (<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2011/04/15/17493790/Baasyir.Enggak.Boleh.Ngebom.Masjid>, 15 Apr. 2011)

⁷ "Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix", *ICG Asia Report* No. 83, 13 Sept. 2004

⁸ "Pelaku Bom Masjid Yogya Disidang", *Detiknews* (<http://preview.detik.com/detiknews/read/2005/09/15/150940/442184/10/pelaku-bom-masjid-yogya-disidang>, 15 Sept. 2005), 15 Apr. 2011

December last year. Unknown parties hurled an improvised explosive device in the direction of the mosque at around 2 p.m., but it bounced off a tree and exploded just outside the mosque's gate. There were no casualties in the incident, and minimal damage was reported. Yogyakarta Police Chief Atang Heriadi said that the initial investigation revealed that the device was an explosive device without a detonator or timer. Meanwhile the National Police spokesman later denied that the explosive was a bomb, and called it "just a big firecracker", wrapped in an aluminium tube, which made a loud explosion.⁹ The three bombs carried similarities that it targeted mosques where the families of the Sultan (both Yogyakarta Sultanate and Cirebon Sultanate) used to pray or the mosque that was established by the Sultan.

The Suicide Bomber

Three days after the bombing, police have confirmed the identity of the suicide bomber was Muhammad Syarif through DNA tests. He was born on 20 August 1979 and still a relative of the Kanoman Palace of Cirebon. His royal blood comes from his mother, Ratu Srimulat.¹⁰ Syarif lived at RT 03/06, Pekalipan Sub-District, Cirebon since 1990. He is the fourth of 8 children, of Abdul Gafur and Ratu Srimulat. His parents had later divorced.¹¹ One of his brothers was a soap opera star.¹² Syarif was later buried in Astana Gunung Jati, the Cirebon's royal sultanate burial.¹³ He was married to Sri Maleha, a 27 years old, who was nine-months pregnant and lives in Panjalin Kidul Village, Sumber Jaya Sub-District, Majalengka Regency, West Java. Police seized a number of items in Syarif's wife house that are similar to the items found at the crime scene.¹⁴

⁹ "Police Investigate Bombing Of Heritage Mosque in Yogya", *The Jakarta Globe* (<http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/indonesia/police-investigate-bombing-of-heritage-mosque-in-yogya/413435>, 23 Dec. 2010)

¹⁰ "Pelaku Bom Bunuh Diri Kerabat Keraton Kanoman", *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/hukum/2011/04/18/brk,20110418-328189,id.html>, 18 Apr. 2011)

¹¹ "MS Dimakamkan di Pemakaman Astana Gunung Jati", *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/hukum/2011/04/17/brk,20110417-328181,id.html>, 17 Apr. 2011)

¹² "Pelaku Bom Cirebon, Kakak Artis Sinetron", *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/politik/2011/04/16/brk,20110416-327948,id.html>, 16 Apr. 2011)

¹³ "MS Dimakamkan di Pemakaman Astana Gunung Jati", *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/hukum/2011/04/17/brk,20110417-328181,id.html>, 17 Apr. 2011)

¹⁴ "Police Temukan Materi Mirip Bom di Rumah MS", *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/hukum/2011/04/17/brk,20110417-328180,id.html>, 17 Apr. 2011)



The suicide bomber

Source: Antaranews

Syarif was also reportedly involved in a number of crimes. He was believed to be involved in the murder of First. Corp. Sutedjo, a low ranking military officer from the Cirebon Regency Military Command, as Syarif's driving license was found in the crime scene. First Corp Sutejo was found dead from multiple stab wounds in Cempaka village, Talun sub-district, Cirebon on 2 April 2011.¹⁵

Andi Mulya, head of the district chapter of the hard-line Movement Against Illegal Sects and Non-Believers (GAPAS), said that Syarif frequently took part in the group's activities including its religious study session. GAPAS is a member of Ummah Islamic Forum (FUI) in Cirebon. Andi denied that Syarif was a member of GAPAS or FUI and revealed that Syarif was on the police's wanted list for the Alfamart case. In that incident, hard-line Islamists staged coordinated raids on three Alfamart convenience stores in September 2010. They seized bottles of alcoholic beverages and destroyed them outside the stores. Mulya said Syarif had also been involved in at least two altercations at the At-Taqwa Mosque, the biggest mosque in Cirebon. In the first incident, Syarif was reported to have kicked people taking an afternoon nap in the mosque after prayers. In the second, he tore down a banner put up inside the building. Testimonies from neighbors and Andi also reveal that Syarif was a very easily angered and mentally challenged.¹⁶

¹⁵ "Syarif Diduga Terseret Kasus Terbunuhnya Anggota TNI", *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/hukum/2011/04/18/brk.20110418-328186.id.html>, 8 Apr. 2011)

¹⁶ "GAPAS Pastikan Pelaku Bom Cirebon Muhammad Syarif", *Tempo Interaktif* (<http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/hukum/2011/04/16/brk.20110416-327958.id.html>, 16 Apr. 2011)

A counterterrorism official said that police were looking into motive for the bombings on Friday bombing and were trying to find the individual that radicalised Syarif. The source said that police had identified JI as a possible player behind the attack. A senior police officer with the National Police's bomb squad or Gegana, confirmed the suspicion and said the explosive device used in the attack was very similar to one that had detonated outside the Science and Technology Development and Research Institute (Puspitek) in Serpong, South Tangerang, in March 2010. That device, was planted in a water culvert but had caused no injuries. The officer said the bomb may have been detonated as a test, and may have been influenced by the late Dr. Azahari.¹⁷

¹⁷ "Suicide Bomber Identified Through DNA, Police Say", *The Jakarta Globe* (<http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/suicide-bomber-identified-through-dna-police-say/436012>, 18 Apr. 2011)