

***Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT):  
The Perpetual Threat***

***An Analysis By:***

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Southeast Asia is not a stranger to terrorism. Since the Viet Nam war, the activities of domestic sectarian terrorist groups have posed a significant challenge to the region's external and internal strength. Since 2008, Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), which is a non-state militant extremist terrorist group in Indonesia, has made strides in two key areas: the modernization of their organization and the enhancement of political influence for radical Darul Islam. JAT also demonstrates that radical terrorism groups are no longer confined to fighting in the hills or using car bombs to blow up markets. The Indonesian national government responses to JAT

movements in the region include counterterrorist initiatives, military and policing strategies, hearts-and-minds campaigns, and funding and support from international governments (including the United States and Australia).

Abu Bakar Bashir founded JAT in July of 2008 in the city of Solo. JAT originated because of a dispute between Bashir and some of the members the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), an organization Bashir has been a part of since 2000. Relations deteriorated between Bashir and MMI following his release in June 2006 from prison in Jakarta, when the two sides competed for control and direction of the group. Bashir accused MMI leadership of having an un-Islamic core value and decision-making council rather than a single leader. This led MMI leaders to accuse Bashir of being tyrannical and irresponsible ([janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/Jamaah-Ansharut-Tauhid-JAT-Indonesia.html](http://janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/Jamaah-Ansharut-Tauhid-JAT-Indonesia.html)). Under Bashir's leadership, JAT has made its presence known since its initial public inauguration.

Bashir structured JAT with an executive council, having each member take a loyalty oath that Bashir administered personally. JAT's lead council originally consisted of ex-MMI members loyal to Bashir but has since not limited its membership to ex-MMI members or general recruitment. Bashir has also welcomed members of Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), such as Abu Tholut who is a convicted terrorist and has strong connections to the Al-Qaeda linked Jamaah Islamiyah. JAT is Indonesia's rising threat because it is not limiting themselves to the same radical, ethnocentric Islamic statements made by other groups in the region. Unlike other regional terrorist organizations, such as Jamaah Islamiyah or Abu Sayyaf Group, JAT has utilized the power of social media to get its message across to current and new members and keep members up to date much like the well known terrorist group, Al-Qaeda. JAT recruits in the main city of Solo; the group's basic ideology is discussed in a booklet entitled *Aqidah & Manhaj*

*Kami, or Our Faith and Method.* This book helps purport the JAT ideology across Indonesia and makes the organization seem more credible and asserts that the JAT radical view of Darul Islam is the only way.

In February of 2010, a JAT terrorist training camp was discovered in the northwestern Indonesian province of Aceh, and although the camp was shut down, the counterterrorism task force, Detachment 88, found scores of weapons and logistics and other training material tied to JAT. JAT is not acting like they are a bandit group bent on stealing a few dollars from local shops, JAT is actively trying to carry out terrorist acts. The most recent of killing of two police officers in Central Sulawesi in May of 2011 and then of the Jakarta police in June of 2010 indicated that the evidence pointed to two members of Bashir's JAT terrorist organization. Moreover, the bombing of a church in September of 2011 has been seen as the responsibility of Achmad Yosepa Hayat, a member of the Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid terror group. Hayat, the 31-year-old suicide bomber of the church, was "directly indoctrinated" by Bashir (<http://www.christianpost.com/news/more-church-bombings-feared-in-indonesia-56706/>). In addition, bombings throughout Jakarta from 2003 through 2009, demonstrate that JAT is a clear and present threat through the use of fear and intimidation in Indonesia.

JAT, even with Bashir now in custody and serving time in jail, still carries out attacks and bombings throughout the region. Bashir contends that Australia and America are out to get him, and stated, "Kill me if they can, if they can't, then just how to eliminate me from the society, because they think my struggle for Islam is dangerous. My trial is not a regular trial, it is a battle against Islam. It is a battle between defenders of Islam and Musrik, the defenders of evil. I am an Islam defender." From his jail cell, Bashir accused Australia and America of playing a big role in his imminent demise. "The trouble makers are these two, (Australia and America) the enemies of

Allah. They try to eliminate me from Indonesia. Because they are the ones who started the crusade war, America, George Bush. Until now Australia and America still have a role in my case. That's clear," Bashir told reporters through the bars

(<http://www.news.com.au/world/security-high-as-radical-indonesian-cleric-abu-as-bakar-bashir-faces-court/story-e6frfkyi-1226076267521>).

In a Q&A session I conducted with Arianti, an Associate Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Arianti stated "the group is still very active and in fact it operates a few websites where they openly conduct recruitments, fundraising, and propagation. Dozens of JAT members underwent military trainings in Aceh in early 2010, where the instructors were former JI members. The weapons were obtained from a corrupt police officer but mostly are smuggled from Mindanao." The operational strength of JAT is between 1,500 – 2,000 members, mostly young people. Arianti also stated something which was more disturbing, "JAT is more tech savvy in the internet and social media domain. JAT's chairman of public relations and Abu Bakar Bashir's son, Abdul Rohim Ba'asyir, is a former deputy of Al-Qaeda's media center in Afghanistan in 2002." He maintains JAT's main site called, <http://ansharuttauhid.com>, to put forth the group's accounts and exploits for use of recruitment.

Understanding terrorist organizations use of the cyber world is crucial from a counterterrorism standpoint and policy making point of view. Bruce Hoffman, a professor and terrorism expert at Georgetown University, agrees to a certain extent. "I don't think anyone is going to be radicalized or mesmerized by this media to pick up a gun or throw a bomb," he said. "But it does provide a very extraordinarily important first step. It certainly serves that purpose." And Hoffman says there is a lesson to be learned from all of this: "These jihadi groups have been

all over this a lot faster and far more ahead of it than many of their government opponents," he said, "so that it will continue to evolve and they will be able to exploit it even more effectively. (<http://www.ideastream.org/news/npr/144342062>)" Not all terrorist groups have recruitment websites or make posts via Twitter or Facebook, however, JAT is forging ahead in new territory and reaching out to a new generation that uses this medium for communication. Following their websites; watching terrorist posted videos; dissecting radical teachings they place on the web; and discovering evolving patterns on how terrorists recruit, train and communicate with members on a global scale, are all vital elements of a successful counterterrorism strategy. The current Counterterrorism policy is to follow the flow of open source information, and the CIA's Open Source Center team pores over Facebook, newspapers, TV news channels, local radio stations, and Internet chat rooms — anything overseas that anyone can access and contribute to openly (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/nov/4/cia-following-twitter-facebook/>).

Monitoring the JAT main website and related websites, for example, will help in understanding JAT extremists' military and religious views, as well as their views on grievances committed in their eyes, and the group's issues they are currently working toward. Monitoring JAT websites could lead to tracking how they conduct business, raise funds, conduct tradecraft, support logistical operations, and what successful and unsuccessful methods of attack they have used in the past or will for future operations. Further web monitoring of JAT will help connect the dots between the various groups spread across Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah, Abu Sayyaf Group and the globe. Since JAT is more outspoken and boisterous than many of the region's terrorist groups, their use of social media, open recruitment, and webcasts have given authorities a deeper look into the group's operations than they had previously. Whether or not the group cares if anyone is watching is another matter all together.

But to freely flaunt a desire to overthrow the government and recruit members in the name of a jihad against the Indonesian government so openly needs to give the Indonesian and other Southeast Asian countries pause as this could signal difficult times to come.

JAT, as of February 23, 2012, has been placed on the Department of State watch list for terrorist groups. In addition to the designation, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned three individuals associated with JAT - Mochammad Achwan, the group's acting emir, Son Hadi bin Muhadjir, its spokesman, and another leader, Abdul Rosyid Ridho Ba'asyir.

The move will freeze any property the three currently hold in the United States, and will prohibit any U.S. citizens from engaging in financial transactions with them (<http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/23/indonesian-group-added-to-u-s-terror-list/>).

The Herald Sun newspaper in Melbourne, Australia covered a story in May of 2011 after the death of Osama bin Laden about Son Hadi, the spokesman of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, who said, "I can say that the jihad movement will not stop just because the leader of al-Qa'ida is dead," Hadi said. He further stated, "Jihad is an obligation from Allah, so even if one big jihad figure is dead, it doesn't mean that the jihad movement will stop because it's the words of Allah, not the words of Osama. (<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/world/indonesian-extremists-jamaah-ansharut-tauhid-say-jihad-will-continue/story-e6frf7lf-1226048968357>)" This is significant because this demonstrates the group's passion to continue the effort regardless if a central figure in the global salafi-jihad is dead or not.

While JAT may be just as outspoken, violent, and determined as Al-Qaeda or Jamaah Islamiyah or the Abu Sayyaf Group, the United States and Australian governments must

maintain a National security perspective framework or it risks the entire safety of the region.

Arianti also said that despite attempts to thwart many of JAT's plots and attacks, the Indonesian government is doing all they can to prevent this group from slowing, with difficulties, because it does not seem that JAT is stopping any time soon and is continually recruiting members.

Brigadier General Tito Karnavian, head of the National Police's counterterrorism unit said that police learned that JAT terrorists were expanding their scope from Western targets to "nearby enemies." A plot to assassinate the President was uncovered after a raid in Jati Asih, Bekasi several weeks after the hotel bombings in June of 2009

(<http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/terrorists-still-lurking-in-indonesia-police-warn/386325>).

The United States Foreign and Counterterrorism policy needs to make a shift in understanding that the Southeast Asia region of the world poses just as large of threat in terrorist activities as the rest of the Middle East or Northern Africa. Most recently, this position can be supported by a recent joint strike on a terrorist facility on Jolo Island by the Philippine and U.S. governments in February of 2012. Through joint intelligence and combined military assistance, the United States is providing a slow but sound strategy to deal with issues concerning terrorists in Southeast Asia. Marginalizing a group like Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid and restricting their extremist cells is one effective tactic in destabilizing this radical group. The United States has no plans to make a military presence felt in Indonesia beyond humanitarian constraints, but will supply help with intelligence support and financial aid to help Indonesia deal with another terrorist group that for the foreseeable future, is here to stay.