



# Asian Conflicts Reports

## ◆ Recent Terrorism Developments in Indonesia

- ◆ China, North Korea-Iran Nuclear Axis
- ◆ Muscular Secularism in Singapore
- ◆ Wahhabism in Sri Lanka
- ◆ Privately Armed Groups in the Philippines

ISSUE 12 | JULY-AUGUST, 2010

catr

Council for Asian  
Transnational Threat Research

# Counter-Terrorism in Indonesia: Recent Developments and Challenges

Nelson Rand

Indonesia's counter-terrorism forces have made significant gains in the first half of 2010, but their success also highlights some crucial shortfalls in the country's counter-terrorism program and reveals a new transformation of Islamic militancy in the country.

The first major success of the year came in late February when police discovered a jihadi training camp in the jungles of northwest Aceh. A cache of M-16s, revolvers and thousands of rounds of ammunition were found, along with Malaysian Army uniforms and a large amount of cash. Subsequent investigations revealed that the group was planning gun attacks on hotels frequented by tourists and high-profile assassinations, including on President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Over 60 suspected cell members have since been arrested and just over a dozen killed.

The group called itself al-Qaeda Serambi Mekkah (al-Qaeda in Aceh), and its discovery in late February was unique in two main ways. First, it was the first known time that Indonesia's jihadists set up a base in Aceh, the country's westernmost province on the tip of Sumatra. Although the province was engaged in a separatist insurgency against Jakarta for over 30 years, radical Islamic militancy had never taken root in the province and it had always remained outside the influence and operational area of Indonesian Jihadist groups, including Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Southeast Asia's largest terrorist network.

Second, members of the group, believed to number just over 100, were from virtually every terrorist network in the country, constituting what the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) calls the "third wave" of Indonesian jihadism. "[T]he training camp in Aceh represented the coming together of mujahidin from a number of different groups in Java and Sumatra who believed that a more coherent strategy for jihad in Indonesia was needed," states a recent ICG report entitled *Indonesia: A Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*. This third wave, according to the ICG, comprises jihadists who are critical of the country's foremost terror group, JI, for its recent tactic of abandoning jihad in favour of religious outreach and education, and also critical of JI's main pro-violent splinter faction that favors mass-casualty suicide bombings and lacks a long-term vision. Instead, these jihadists prefer targeted assassinations and attacks that don't involve the loss of innocent Muslim lives and believe that jihad should be waged as a means to an end, as opposed to an end in itself.

Uncovering this group led Indonesia's counter-terrorism forces to another significant success. As operations against 'al Qaeda in Aceh' shifted to Jakarta in early March, Indonesia's elite counter-terrorism force, Detachment 88, closed in on one of Southeast Asia's most wanted terrorists, Dulmatin.

Nicknamed 'Genius,' Dulmatin was a car salesman before launching his career as a jihadist. He received training in Afghanistan in the early 1990s and went on to become a senior member of JI. An expert in explosives, he was one of the key perpetrators of the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed 202 people. He is believed to have assembled most of the bombs and suicide vests for the attack, as well as detonating one of the bombs with a mobile phone.

Dulmatin fled to the Southern Philippines in 2003 where he joined with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and later the Abu Sayaf group (ASG). It is believed he snuck back into Indonesia in late 2007. Back in his native country, he went on to set up and lead the new terror cell in Aceh. He had a 10 million-dollar reward on his head by the US Rewards for Justice Program.

On 9 March 2010, commandos of Detachment 88 tailed Dulmatin and his wife riding a motorbike in Pamulang, west of Jakarta. He dropped his wife off at a beauty salon and then went to an Internet café. After five minutes online, he was shot dead by Detachment 88. Two of his bodyguards were also shot and killed that day in a separate raid. Dulmatin's death was a huge blow to Indonesia's jihadist network, and a major victory in the country's fight against terror.

Indonesia's latest significant counter-terrorism success came in late June with the arrest of Abdullah Sunata, who became the country's most wanted terrorist after the killing of Dulmatin. It wasn't the first time he was arrested. In June 2005, Sunata was arrested and later sentenced to seven years in prison for harboring the Malaysian-born terrorist Noordin Top, a key plotter of the 2002 Bali bombings (Top was killed by Detachment 88 commandos in September 2009). Sunata was released for good behavior in April 2009 as Indonesian authorities believed he had been de-radicalized. They were wrong. Immediately after his release he returned to the shadowy world of Indonesian jihadism and became a key member of Dulmatin's Aceh-based terror cell.



1

Al-Qaeda Serambi Mekkah (al-Qaeda in Aceh), a 100 member Jihadist base discovered in Aceh for the first time

2

Membership is drawn from virtually every terrorist network in the country representing the 'third wave' of Indonesian jihadism

3

The group prefer targeted assassinations and attacks on non-Muslims, rather than mass killings, as a means to an achieve predefined objectives



Sunata was arrested on 24 June with two of his aides after Detachment 88 commandos raided their hideout in central Java. A third suspect, Yuli Karsono, was shot dead. Like Sunata, Karsono also spent time in prison. He was an officer in Indonesia's armed forces but dismissed and jailed for smuggling ammunition. It was during his time in prison that the former soldier became radicalized. Upon his release he went straight into an active terror cell.

The cases of Abdullah Sunata and Yuli Karsono, brought to light by the success of Indonesia's counter-terrorism forces in reining them in, highlight one of the major shortfalls of the country's largely successful counter-terrorism program: the Indonesian penal system.

"In prison [terrorists] can convene, sit and discuss freely, secured by the government," the head of Detachment 88, Colonel Tito Karnavian, told reporters at a press conference following the arrest of Sunata and the killing of Karsono. The National Police spokesperson at the same press conference warned that Indonesia's prisons were at risk of becoming "schools" for terrorists.

Of the more than 70 members of the Aceh-based terror cell who were captured or killed since the group's discovery by authorities in February, at least 14 were either once convicted or arrested, most on terrorism charges. Analysts note that inmates convicted on terrorism charges should be monitored more closely and a sound de-radicalization program needs to be put in place. The ICG, in its recent report mentioned above, notes that the coming together of jihadists from various groups to form the Aceh cell was made possible by "regular communication between prisoners and ex-prisoners, via mobile phone and direct visits."

"A de-radicalization program is highly needed in Indonesia's prisons," says Noor Huda Ismail, executive director and founder of the Institute of International Peace Building, a Jakarta-based think tank. "There needs to be a systematic way to disengage these individuals from violence," he says, adding that there is a dilemma in incarcerating convicted terrorists and extremists. "If we put these individuals together in the same prison, we risk strengthening their cause. If we separate them, we risk expanding their cause."

Significantly, although Indonesian authorities have arrested more than 450 suspected militants since 2002, the vast majority have been given lenient prison sentences, while many have been given early release.

A second shortfall of Indonesia's counter-terrorism program highlighted by recent successes, in particular the elimination of Dulmatin in March and of Noordin Top six months earlier, is the killing of key terrorist suspects instead of capturing them alive. Indonesian counter-terrorism forces have a startling kill-to-capture ratio of about one to four (although this is improving this year). By killing key suspects, authorities lose the opportunity to gain valuable intelligence, as well as risk losing legitimacy in the eyes of the public, which in turn can play into the hands of the terrorists. "The police are not in the killing business. I know those guys in the killing business. If we do the same thing we are like them," says Noor Huda, adding that valuable evidence and legal testimony is also lost by killing key suspects.

Analysts note that other shortfalls in Indonesia's counter-terrorism program include weak legislation, corruption, and lax regulations that allow activities such as paramilitary training and the publishing of jihadist material. Despite such shortfalls, Indonesia has one of the most sound and sophisticated counter-terrorism programs in place today. This includes addressing terrorist threats through more police work than through military means, establishing village-level intelligence networks, allowing opportunities for Islamists to participate in above-ground organizations, and relatively quiet and behind-the-scenes cooperation and coordination with the United States, Australia and regional governments. Successful results, like those recorded in the first half of 2010, will likely continue to be a mainstay of Indonesia's counter-terrorism forces in the months and years to come.

-

# China and the North Korea-Iran Nuclear Axis

Christina Y. Lin



On May 20 South Korea (ROK) ended all ambiguity on the sinking of their *Cheonan* naval vessel by a torpedo attack from the North Korean DPRK. Since then, as expected, China once again watered down any sanctions on the DPRK and Iran's nuclear programs. Meanwhile, the DPRK has stepped up its rhetoric and threatened an "all out war" on any sanctions or military actions. In the same week, the DPRK's WMD proliferating partner, Iran, threatened Israel that "if the Zionist regime attacks Iran, the Zionists will have no longer than a week to live." With war drums being beaten in both the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East, a sign of a DPRK and Iran emboldened by the inability of the international community to stop their nuclear programs, eyes now fall on the credibility of the U.S. security umbrella over its allies Israel and the ROK. At a time when rogue regimes are pursuing nuclear weapons and setting off a cascade of nuclear proliferation that threatens the NPT regime, the U.S. and the international community are bound in the stalemate of the UNSC conceptual framework. U.S. policymakers are not fully internalizing the nuances of alternative paradigms, nor the new fault lines of emerging new geopolitical and economic realities. It is now time for U.S. policymakers to consider some of the conceptual game changes that have taken place in the world over the last decade and find a new roadmap by which to lead a coalition of like-minded states on issues such as the DPRK-Iran nuclear proliferation. There is also a continuing need to maintain a robust security guarantee for U.S. allies.

## The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the North Korea-Iran Nuclear Axis:

There has been a growing body of literature on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), most recently on its increasing role in Afghanistan and whether it should be engaged with by NATO. However, to date there has been no attempt to apply this analytical lens to the DPRK-Iran nuclear issue. SCO members consist of China, Russia, and the four central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as four observers of Iran, Pakistan, India and Mongolia. There has been increasing cooperation between China, Russia and Iran on the issue of energy, and the Sino-Russian axis in the UNSC has persistently stonewalled or watered down sanctions on the DPRK and Iran for their nuclear non-compliance. This suggests a regrouping of states in the SCO paradigm that supersedes the UN framework on the DPRK-Iran nuclear axis:

1

The inability of the USA to prevent North Korean and Iranian Nuclearization is casting doubts on the credibility of the US security umbrella over its allies

2

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization grouping of states is increasingly superseding the UN and other traditional security paradigms

3

China is becoming a de facto guarantor of security for rogue regimes such as Iran and the DPRK

## Conventional Paradigm: Six Powers & Six Parties vs. rogue regimes

**P5+1 (6 Powers) → U.S.A, Germany, France, UK vs China, Russia on Iran**  
**Six Party → U.S.A, Japan, ROK, (DPRK) vs China, Russia on North Korea**

## New SCO Paradigm: NATO members/partners vs. SCO members/observers

**NATO members → Germany, France China, Russia ← SCO members**  
**and partners UK, Japan Iran, (DPRK) and observers**  
**(democracies) ROK, U.S.A (authoritarian regimes)**

It is helpful to treat the DPRK-Iran axis as one unit in applying the new SCO paradigm, since DPRK-Iran strategic cooperation dates back to the first days of the Islamic Republic. Its basis is clear - Iran needs access to advanced military technology to underwrite its regional ambitions while the DPRK needs hard currency to support its isolated regime as an international pariah. The DPRK's Nodong and Taepodong missile series were the basis for Iran's flagship Shahab missile project, and they cooperate via proxy missile testing to evade sanctions, regular data exchanges, as well as in the nuclear realm. In addition, extensive evidence has emerged to suggest DPRK's role in the construction of the Hizbullah underground tunnel network that played a vital role in the 2006 Second Lebanon War. The Lebanese tunnels bear a striking resemblance to similar facilities discovered by the ROK near the DMZ, and the DPRK has even trained three top Hizbullah officials - Hassan Hasrallah, Hizbullah's secretary general and the head of the Hizbullah military organization; Ibrahim Akil, head of Hizbullah's security and Intelligence service; and Mustapha Badreddine, Hizbullah's counter-espionage chief.



The overwhelming evidence of DPRK sponsor of terrorism and WMD proliferation, coupled with its recent aggression against the ROK, have energized U.S. lawmakers to press the Obama administration to re-list DPRK as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Currently tensions are high on the Korean Peninsula as China and DPRK stepped up their rhetoric against U.S.-ROK military exercises in Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea. Washington and Seoul have been troubled by China's silence on the *Cheonan* issue and also by Chinese president Hu Jintao hosting of Kim Jong Il in Beijing on May 4, 2010. Beijing waited nearly a month after the vessel's sinking before extending condolences to the ROK, and scholars such as Ralph Cossa, head of Pacific Forum of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, observed that "When it comes to dealing with North Korea, Washington (And I would argue Seoul even more so) increasingly sees China as part of the problem rather than the solution." It appears that the DPRK and Iran have both learned to play the 'China card' in the UNSC.

#### **The China Card:**

China has a mutual defense treaty with the DPRK, and sees it as an important buffer zone and guard post in a Taiwan contingency. In a 2006 *China Security* article by Shen Dingli, executive director of International Studies Institute and Center for American Studies in Fudan University, he laid out the strategic significance of the DPRK in China's policy towards the U.S. China's main goals are economic development and national re-unification with Taiwan. With a shared border of 1,400 km, the DPRK acts as a guard post for China against U.S. troops in the ROK, thereby allowing China to redeploy military assets away from Northeast Asia towards Taiwan. He further argued that a nuclear DPRK is an asset to China's security, because a nuclear DPRK could pin down U.S. forces in a Taiwan contingency and deter U.S. considerations of possible military intervention. In this case, a nuclear DPRK makes war on the Peninsula less likely, given U.S. wariness of risking its troops in the ROK and Japan. Shen conceded that the DPRK used the six-party talks to buy time to develop nuclear weapons.

Similarly, Iran plays the 'China card' in the Persian Gulf. In 2000, a Chinese article in the influential *Strategy and Management Journal* recommended that China's strategy in the Persian Gulf should be to align with Iran. The author posits that since the U.S. already controls the west bank of the oil rich Persian Gulf via its pro-American proxies (Saudi Arabia, smaller Gulf states), the Gulf is in effect an "internal sea" for the U.S. and challenges to that position are likely to fail. However, if China and Russia expand relations with Iran, they could maintain a "minimum balance" to thwart U.S. moves. Since oil imports from the Gulf require both the U.S. controlled west bank and China-Russia supported Iranian east bank, this axis would block U.S. efforts to impose oil embargoes against other countries. In the event of a Sino-U.S. military clash over Taiwan, the U.S. would be unable to shut off China's Gulf oil supplies since China, Russia and Iran control the Gulf's east bank. In 2001, China adopted this strategic vision and founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that paved way for the current Sino-Russia-Iran axis to counter perceived U.S. hegemony. This reflects a realignment of countries that divides, rather than unites the UNSC actors, and results in a stalemate that has been unable to prevent a nuclear DPRK or a nuclearizing Iran. In turn, the protective Chinese umbrella in the UNSC further emboldens the DPRK and Iran to engage in aggressive behavior.

#### **Conclusion:**

Given the failure of a policy of engagement to prevent the emergence of a nuclear DPRK and a nuclearizing Iran, U.S. allies are beginning to consider their own nuclear options to hedge against a perceived waning U.S. power in a multi-polar world. It is important at this critical juncture for the U.S. to recalibrate its engagement policy and maintain the credibility of its security guarantee. Since the realignment of SCO actors' interests in the UNSC has stonewalled any effective sanctions, the U.S. and her allies need to consider an alternative path to resolve the threats of the DPRK-Iran nuclear axis. Leading a coalition of like-minded states to implement crippling sanctions on Iran and DPRK may be a first step to stopping further aggression, and conducting military exercises to demonstrate solidarity in face of threats is a good way to reassure U.S. allies. As John F Kennedy said in face of the Cuban missile crisis; "the 1930s taught us a clear lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged ultimately leads to war."

•

# Religious Fundamentalism and Muscular Secularism in Singapore

Kumar Ramakrishna



For most security analysts, the highlight of the year 2009 was the re-arrest, in May of Singapore's most wanted terrorist, Mas Selamat Kastari, the operational leader of the local cell of the Al Qaeda-affiliated but Indonesia-based Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) network. Mas Selamat or "MSK" as he is known had created a furor in February 2008, escaping from detention and sparking a massive nationwide manhunt. Eventually, based on information supplied by the Singapore and Indonesian authorities, the Malaysian Special Branch re-arrested MSK in Johore, in southern Malaysia, just across the Causeway from Singapore. While violent religious extremism as exemplified by the MSK affair appeared to dominate the headlines, a more careful appraisal of the security landscape in Singapore suggests that this was in fact not a stand-alone phenomenon but rather merely one "species" of a much broader trend, religious fundamentalism, that appeared to afflict the city-state that year. In this respect, the MSK recapture aside, the nation was also captivated by the so-called AWARE saga that took place between March and May 2009. AWARE - which stands for Association of Women for Action and Research - is a secular, civil society grouping that has sought to promote women's rights down the years. In March 2009, a group of Christian women from a church captured control of AWARE because they had been offended at what they felt was AWARE's pro-homosexual agenda. The ensuing media coverage resulted in the issue becoming framed as a clash between an apparently rapacious Christian minority and an Alternative Lifestyle lobby doggedly fighting a rearguard action to preserve its rights. In a - by Singaporean standards - raucous Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) in early May, the Christian women were booted out and a more secular management team voted in to take charge of AWARE affairs.

The Singapore State was extremely concerned at these various developments. It paid as much attention to the MSK affair as to these other manifestations of a broader trend of religious fundamentalism. The State regards religious fundamentalism as a serious existential threat to the social fabric of the nation - and regards it as a national security issue of the utmost importance. There have been two contending perspectives for coping with religious fundamentalism in Singapore, which we may term the "Muscular Secularist" and "Liberal Secularist" views. There has been increasing pressure both from inside and outside Singapore on the State to soften its no-nonsense Muscular Secularist stance on coping with religious fundamentalism in Singapore and imbibe elements of the more nuanced Liberal Secularist perspective. However Muscular Secularism is likely to remain the State's preferred philosophy for managing religious fundamentalism for the foreseeable future.

In August 2009, Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng reiterated the State's non-nonsense position on religion in Singapore. He pointed out that as Singaporeans "seek out religion we must not do so in a way that leads to closed minds and exclusive groups". He added that as "Singapore is a dense urban city with people of different races and religions living in close proximity", the "practice of religion should not lead to exclusivity where we only interact with people of the same faith or worse, criticise and exclude people of other faiths". In other words, Wong was intimating that the State in Singapore was "secular" in the sense that it does not profess a state religion nor does it promote any particular faith at the expense of others. It acts as a *muscular* if neutral umpire between the contending interests of the various faiths. Wong added that religious groups should stay out of the political arena and not "campaign to change certain government policies, or use the pulpit to mobilise their followers to pressure the Government, or push aggressively to gain ground at the expense of other groups". He asserted that "keeping religion and politics separate is a key rule of political engagement". Driving home the point, he made it clear that Singapore's "political arena must always be a secular one", because its "laws and policies do not derive from religious authority, but reflect the judgments and decisions of the secular Government and Parliament to serve the national interest and collective good".

The Singapore State's Muscular Secularism is fleshed out in policy and legislation: the Internal Security Act empowers the State to engage in preventive detention of individuals suspected of being involved in terrorist or other activity deemed prejudicial to national security. The Sedition Act empowers the State to prosecute individuals that post offensive comments against other religions on websites or pass out offensive material. Furthermore, the Undesirable Publications Act enables authorities to ban "objectionable" publications that are regarded as threatening religious harmony. Last but by no means least, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act empowers the State to prosecute any religious leader who causes ill-will between different religious groups, or promotes a political or subversive cause under the guise of propagating a religious belief.

1

Multi-ethnic and multi-religious Singapore is being affected by rising number of cases of religious fundamentalism

2

The Singaporean State is responding by reiterating its hard 'muscular secularist' stance, keeping religious and civil identity separated

3

Increasingly there is friction between the State and liberalist, Christian evangelical and Islamic organizations



The State's philosophy of Muscular Secularism has not gone unchallenged. There are two main counter-arguments. The first posits that the State needs to cede more political space so as to engender the spontaneously active citizenry and civil society characteristic of mature polities. The other argues that faith groups should have greater liberty, within the secular constitutional framework, for untrammelled religious expression without the State setting limits on what those modes of expression should be. Taken together these two strands of arguments may be regarded as constituting a "Liberal Secularist" perspective on the issue of coping with religious fundamentalism in Singapore. In the first instance, Liberal Secularist advocates insist that the 21<sup>st</sup> century Singapore citizenry, despite their diverse faith and ethnic backgrounds, are well able to display the necessary political and emotional maturity to exercise rational judgment in matters of religion. The State, they argue, should therefore trust Singaporeans to do the right thing and eliminate its paternalistic attitude toward governance. The resolution of the AWARE saga in May 2009 with the entirely constitutional (if boisterous) removal of the religious hardliners from the leadership, Liberal Secularists argue, demonstrate the apparently innate capacity of Singaporean civil society – in this specific instance the Alternative Lifestyle lobby, many of whom are well-represented in the well-educated professional classes – to counter and neutralize the machinations of religious fundamentalists without any State intervention.

Other Liberal Secularists seek greater *religious* space. They chafe at the way the State has appeared to have exceeded its remit by defining the acceptable limits and modes of religious expression. For instance, since the public discussions leading to the passage of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act in 1989, Protestant Christianity in Singapore has arguably had to grapple with the image of being characterized by "aggressive proselytizing". This perception has remained a source of irritation in some Christian quarters. The 2009 AWARE episode only stoked concerns in these circles that the community may face even greater State scrutiny in future: a core concern being the possibility of further State-imposed restrictions on proselytization efforts, a core facet of evangelical Christianity. One Protestant Singaporean even blogged that "banning" proselytization "or evangelism" would be "detrimental to racial and religious harmony". Protestant Christians aside, it is the Malay-Muslim community that arguably continues to best illustrate the clamor for greater religious space. The global Islamic revival of the 1980s strongly enhanced the Singaporean Muslim community's transnational Islamic consciousness and identification. This has generated friction between the community and the State since the late 1990s, most evidently in the sensitive realm of Islamic education. Specifically, the State sought to rationalize Islamic school (*madrasah*) education to avoid a future over-supply of Islamic teachers, as well as a lack of economically competitive Malay-Muslim graduates able to function in a multiracial setting. This interventionism provoked a sharp negative reaction from sections of the community. In addition, the ban of the wearing of headscarves or *tudung* by Muslim schoolgirls attending national schools led to more grumbling that the State was being overly Muscular Secularist in its policies.

Singaporeans remain, despite their international exposure and worldliness, a generally religious lot. The respected World Values Survey in 2002 for instance showed that over 70 percent of Singaporean respondents considered religion "important" or "very important" in their lives; generally fulfilled religious obligations and "were more likely to place religious activities above other social activities". Hence tackling religious fundamentalism within Singapore, as the events of 2009 suggested, is not an abstract matter. The Singapore State has apparently decided that - despite the demands of preserving legitimacy with an increasingly influential domestic liberal constituency - one thing must never be forgotten: paraphrasing Michael Ignatieff, Singaporeans are simply not likely to "fly free" of the "net of religion" on their own volition - without vigilant, occasional prodding. The mutually reinforcing, virtuous cycle of religious harmony, political stability and economic growth remains the perceived sacrosanct formula for continued national success - and this must not be left to chance. While the finer future details of Muscular Secularism may evolve at the edges, ultimately, everything else must continue to be organized around this core formula. •

# Encroaching Wahhabism among Sri Lanka's Muslims

Ranga Jayasuriya



1

A new Wahhabist sect, the Tawhid Jamath, has founded up to 200 fundamentalist mosques across Sri Lanka

2

Escalating sectarian strife claimed two killed last year, when a Tawhid Jamath mosque was stormed by non-Wahhabist locals

3

An important Sufi mosque was raised by Wahhabists using claymore mines and the body of the local Pir was burned

In the southern coastal city of Beruwala, Sri Lanka, sectarian strife is brewing as Wahhabism, the austere form of Islam at the core of Al Qaeda Salafi jihad ideology, is making inroads. A centuries old theological dispute has reignited in this particular town as Wahhabism confronts local Islamic traditions that have traditionally been infused with mystical and tolerant Sufi ideas. The new sect, termed Tawhid Jamath, practices a rigid form of Islam, based on a literal interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. Its followers say they are practicing the 'pure Islam' and that those who refuse to join them are infidel. It is estimated that there are over 200 mosques of the Tawhid sect island wide, and their fellowship is growing.

Wahhabism advocates the fusion of state power and religion through the re-establishment of the form of government adopted by the Prophet Muhammad's successors during the age of Muslim expansion. Local Maulavis and prominent Muslim laymen, wary of the fringe teachings of the new sect, allege that the Tawhid Jamath is radicalizing the local youth by preaching an extremist and militant version of Islam and that it is sending youth to Wahhabist madrasah in Saudi Arabia and South Asia.

Although the new sect is still a minority among the predominantly Muslim population in Beruwala, it is rich in monetary terms, thanks to Saudi funding, and is actively promoting Wahhabism. According to a 2003 report of US Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security, the Saudis have spent at least \$87 billion (US) propagating Wahhabism abroad over the past two decades.

Until 2002, when Tawhid Jamath built the mosque, sectarian strife was unheard of in Beruwala as the entire Islamic population in the town practiced Sufi infused Islam teachings. However since 2002, when preachers returning from religious schools in the Middle East founded the new sect, it has become a centre of tension in the Islamic community. This was transformed into sporadic violent clashes last year when the Rahuman mosque was torched, resulting in two people killed and nine wounded.

The Tawhid sect has been cited in global Salafi jihad propaganda and is alleged to have maintained links with controversial Yemeni cleric Anwar al Awlaki, a torch bearer of Salafi jihad ideology who calls for holy war against the West. At the time that the Rahuman mosque was attacked by local Muslims, Anwar al Awlaki's Islamic website, which had been a major tool of radicalization, circulated the news, paying homage to 'martyrs' - the two Tawhid followers who were killed in the clash. Awlaki's website was closed down after the Fort Hood shooting by US army major Malik Hasan, who is alleged to have maintained e-mail contact with the Yemeni cleric. The Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who made an abortive effort to blow up a transatlantic flight, is also alleged to have drawn inspiration and met the Yemeni cleric, who is now in the most wanted terrorist list of the United States.

Maulavi Mubarak, of Sheik Mustafa Musjid, another well established and important local mosque blames Thawhed Jamath for fuelling recent violence. "Local youth were taken to madrasahs in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. They returned, set up their mosque and are continuing to send local youth to these countries. These students are brainwashed, taught extremist religious views. When they return after studies, they maintain contacts with their madrasahs and continue to receive money to build mosques and to promote Wahhabism." Instead of standard Islamic texts taught in Islamic schools in the country, Tawhid Jamath is teaching from Wahhabist textbooks, derived from the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab, an 18th century religious zealot, after whom the movement is named. Maulavi Mubarak says the austere brand of religion promoted by Tawhid Jamath is a vulgarization of deep-rooted local Islamic practices. "Their religious views are extreme and authoritarian. They are Taliban in a different name."

Another preacher, Maulavi Mohammed Shareef Mohamed Hussair, says that Tawhid Jamath promotes fundamentalism through Friday prayers claiming over loudspeakers that the devotees of Sufism are infidels. "We had Friday prayers for centuries, but we didn't use loudspeakers until Tawhid Jamath began using them, condemning our religious practices, calling us non Muslims."

Reyyaz Sally, Chairman of Islamic Solidarity Front says the Wahhabists are forcing the extreme creed of religion on unsuspecting Sri Lankan Muslims who have been enticed with the promise of money. "They pay 25,000 rupees to Muslims who bury the dead in their mosque. Then they ask family members to come to prayers. When they continue to attend the prayers, they are brainwashed."



Wahhabist ideology is also making inroads in other parts of Sri Lanka, especially in Kattankudy in the east and Puttalam in the northwest of the island. Relative poverty and social deprivation in both areas has made them fertile ground for recruiters to woo youth the new mosques. Kattankudy is recovering from prolonged ethnic conflict, while Puttalam houses a large population of northern Muslims evicted by the LTTE.

In the east, Wahhabism is taking an increasingly violent turn. Two years ago, after a burial of a Maulavi of a Sufi mosque in Kattankudy, alleged Wahhabists razed the mosque to the ground using claymore mines. The attackers dug out the remains of the Maulavi and burnt it in an open pyre in the mosque premises.

It is speculated that these newly radicalized communities are ripe recruiting ground for terrorist organizations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba. Admiral Robert Willard, Commander of the US Pacific Command in his testimony before the US Senate Armed Services Committee has stated that the Lashkar-e-Taiba group is expanding and specifically positioning itself in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. However, the Sri Lankan government has denied the knowledge of the LeT presence in the country.

Last year two Jihadist groups in the east surrendered weapons in response to an amnesty announced by the government. This year, during the annual Ramadan feast of Buhari Mosque in Beruwela, there had been sporadic attacks, for which no one has taken responsibility. There were arson attacks against several shops. Several motorcycles were damaged and police seized knuckle-dusters.

Evidence also exists that the rise of Wahhabism in Sri Lanka is also backed by limited political patronage. Police say a government parliamentarian in Puttalam district was behind an illegal radio transmission which broadcast extremist religious propaganda during the run-up to the general election. Two weeks ago Tawhid Jamath was also at the centre of the recent controversy over operating an illegal radio broadcast.

Reyyaz Sally, Chairman of the Islamic Solidarity Front, says the Muslim Affairs Department of the Sri Lanka government is paying blind eye to the impending threat. "There are senior officials who condone extremism and actively lobby to get extremists appointed to top posts." He says the absence of a Waqf board, which expired in January this year, is confounding the situation. Extremists are trying to get into trustee boards of certain mosques by lobbying top officials. I know some have already been appointed," he says.

#### **Excerpts from an interview with 'Nizam', the caretaker of Rahuman mosque in Beruwela**

"We believe in the uniqueness and unity of God (Tawhid) and he alone is the believer's lord. We take the Quran and Hadith as the only fundamental and authoritative texts and follow them to the letter."

"Wahhab is another name for Tawhid. Ibn abd al-Wahhab didn't invent anything new. He preached the pure Islam which the Prophet preached centuries ago. We follow what prophet preached in Mecca and Medina

#### ***Does Tawhid receive funds from Saudi Arabia?***

"There is zakath, 2.5% of income that every Muslim should give to charity. We receive money in the form of zakath. There are some Saudi philanthropists who want to build a mosque. So they come to Asia and when they meet true practitioners of Islam, they build mosques. That is how we receive funds and build our mosques."

#### ***Are you sending youth to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia for religious studies?***

"It has been a practice in this country that some youth who finished studies at local madrasahs go abroad for higher studies. I am not aware of Pakistan. But we send young people for education to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, where there is famous Al Azhar University. These are the countries from where you can learn pure and authentic Islam." ●

# Private Armed Groups: A New Security Threat in the Philippines

Rommel C. Banlaoi

The rapid proliferation of private armed groups (PAGs) has become a serious national security problem for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). From a mere peace and order concern for the Philippine National Police (PNP), the proliferation of private armed groups is increasingly threatening security at a national level. The Department of National Defense (DND) has recently declared PAGs as one of the greatest concerns to the country's defense and security, along with local communist movements and Muslim secessionist movements.

According to the Independent Commission Against Private Armies (ICAPA), formed in the aftermath of the 23 November 2009 massacre of 57 persons in the Maguindanao province of the Southern Philippines, 112 PAGs have been identified across the country. The ICAPA reports that most of these PAGs are found in the Muslim areas of Mindanao, but does not specify how many or the exact proportion.

However, the ICAPA figure on PAG numbers is highly conservative. In the Philippines, it is customary for all local government officials to have two or more private armed bodyguards. As the Philippines has 82 provinces, 122 cities and 1,495 municipalities, not to mention at least 287 members of the Philippine House of Representatives, the true number of PAGs in the Philippines must be far larger than 112. In Maguindanao province alone, almost all of its 36 municipalities have two or more armed groups. In Sulo and Basilan, there is a saying that each household has a gun - this is a very telling indicator of how big the problem of privately armed violence in the Philippines really is.

One issue surrounding the rise of PAGs is the difficulty of adopting an adequate definition. The ICAPA reports that some private armies in the Philippines are organized and funded by the government to fight crime and insurgencies, and this makes the definition of private armies in the Philippines highly problematic. If some PAGs are government-organized and funded, can they really be referred to as fully 'private' armies?

Furthermore, if the 112 PAGs identified by ICAPA refer to the illegally armed private groups maintained by traditional warlords without the sanction of the government, how can they be dismantled if they serve elected officials? Additionally, how can the police and the military effectively pursue PAGs, if many of them have more resources and stronger firepower than local law enforcement?

Ultimately, the problem of private armed violence in the Philippines has become a larger security threat because it exacerbates already existing security challenges emanating from a shifting network of local communist and Moro secessionist insurgencies. Also, when PAGs are not fighting against one other for political and personal reasons, they are likely as not conniving together to commit crimes such as arms smuggling, drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnap-for-ransom. These crimes are committed primarily for financial gain.

From a human security perspective, private armed violence threatens the welfare of local populations, as was the case in the November 2009 Maguindanao massacre, in which 57 people were killed, including the wife, sister, and aids of opposition candidate Esmel Mangudadatu, several innocent by-standers, and at least 34 journalists (see the March 2010 *ACR* for this author's report on the incident). PAGs also perpetuate the practice of settling private problems and local disputes through the use of armed and violent confrontation. This practice aggravates an already weak rule-of-law, creates semi-anarchy in some communities, and undermines human rights by creating a politics of fear and intimidation in the day-to-day lives of many people. The situation propagates itself as a vicious circle; the PAGs are, in part, a response to weak central government services in many under-developed localities, but the atmosphere of fear they create in turn discourages the very foreign and local entrepreneurs from investing in the areas where they are needed most in order to propel local economic development, create jobs and reduce poverty. In the view of potential investors, the resulting high costs of ensuring personal and infrastructure security far outbalances any potential profit.

Private armed violence exists because of a weak state that fails to insulate itself from the parochial interests of clans and families maintaining their own private armies. PAGs also proliferate when some corrupt key military, police and elected government officials are beholden to local warlords. The result has been the evolution of a complex network that will be extremely difficult to dismantle in a society already torn by complex internal armed conflicts.

Identifying and addressing the underlying causes and conditions of internal armed conflicts in the Philippines is a key first step to deal with private armed violence. In a weak state this task is truly gargantuan, but it is achievable and must be tackled. Overall, the Philippines must urgently pursue security sector reform - a vital task that is easier said than done. •



1

57 people were killed by private armed groups (PAGs) in November 2009 during the single Maguindanao massacre

2

The Philippine Department of National Defense has just declared PAGs to be a significant threat to Philippine security

3

The Independent Commission Against Private Armies has identified 112 PAGs operating across the Philippines, but the real number is much higher

# Asian Conflicts Reports

## Council For Asian Terrorism Research

### Editors

Dr. Caroline Ziemke | Institute for Defence Analysis, Washington, D.C.  
Dr. Julian Droogan | Macquarie University, Australia  
Mr Shanaka Jayasekara | Macquarie University, Australia

### About the Authors

NELSON RAND is an independent journalist based in Singapore.

CHRISTINA Y. LIN is Visiting Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, U.S.A.

KUMAR RAMAKRISHNA is Head of the Centre of Excellence for National Security at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

RANGA JAYASURIYA is News Editor and Defence Correspondent at Lakbima News

ROMMEL C. BANLAOI is Chairman of the Board and the Executive Director of the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR) and Head of its Center for Intelligence and National Security Studies.

The Council on Asian Terrorism Research includes as its members:

Afghanistan: Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies | Australia: Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, Macquarie University | Bangladesh: Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies | Bangladesh: Bangladesh Institute for Peace & Security Studies | India: Institute of Conflict Management | Indonesia: Center for the Study of Islam and Society, State Islamic University of Indonesia | Japan: Research Institute of Science and Technology | Malaysia: Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism | Pakistan: Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies | Philippines: Strategic and Integrative Studies Center | Philippines: Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research | Singapore: International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Nanyang University | Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka International Centre for Terrorism Research and Conflict Management | USA: Institute for Defense Analyses |

For inquiries about CATR or Asian Conflicts Reports:

Dr. Caroline Ziemke,  
SFRD, Institute for Defense Analyses,  
4850 Mark Center Drive,  
Alexandria VA, 22311, USA.  
E-mail: [cziemke@ida.org](mailto:cziemke@ida.org)

