



An In-depth Look at the Jemaah Islamiyah Network

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Seeking to destabilize regional governments and cultivate cooperation and sharing of resources with homegrown terrorist and separatist groups, the radical Islamist Indonesian group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), poses a significant threat to the United States and its interests. The umbrella terrorist network exploits Southeast Asia's lax security controls to set up front companies, fundraise, forge documents, and purchase weapons. The predominantly weak states of the region suffer from limited reach of law enforcement, poor border controls, and underdeveloped financial institutions that combine to provide fertile ground for JI's growth. Political and logistical difficulties in monitoring Islamic charity networks, Islamic banks, and money-laundering operations encourage the growth of the organization through the creation of Al Qaeda syndicates and cooperation with organized crime networks. Poverty and underdevelopment further encourage terrorist sympathizers and recruits in the Muslim region of Thailand, where a large part of the youth have attended Saudi funded schools (*pendoks*), and follow a stringent brand of *Wahhabism*.¹ This article examines the JI organization in depth and presents the internal debate among terrorism scholars concerning the nature of the JI - Al Qaeda link. In this context, it will assess the JI's threat potential to harm U.S. interests in Southeast Asia and conclude with policy recommendations to contain the organization.

Background

Abdullah Sungkar, co-founder of the Pondok Ngruki schooling network in Central Java in 1971, established JI in Malaysia in 1995 as an "ideological hybrid" of Darul Islam and Saudi Wahhabism.² Sungkar found inspiration in radical thinkers that promoted literal interpretations of Islam, such as Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and Sayyid Qutb, who espoused doctrines legitimizing militant Jihad against non-Islamic regimes. JI envisions the founding of an Islamic state, Daulah Islamiyah Nusantara, which would include Malaysia, Indonesia, southern Thailand, the southern Philippines and Singapore.³ Based on its desire to replicate the pristine Islam of the founding ancestors (*salaf*), JI "justifie[s] violence against Muslim rulers who suppressed Islamic law... as well as violence against Americans and 'Crusaders' promoting secular societies responsible for the subjugation of Islam since the abolition of the caliphate in 1924."⁴ In October of 2002, the organization's current spiritual leader, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, delivered a sermon that marked a public shift away from JI's strategy of a purely internal struggle against corrupt Muslim rulers; he preached that Americans are directing

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Indonesian affairs and assault Islam by orchestrating bombings and libels aimed at weakening the defenders of the faith.⁵ Attacking Western and U.S. interests may have replaced, if not overtaken, the primary focus on Indonesian Christian targets, as the attacks on a nightclub in Bali in 2002 and on the Australian embassy in Jakarta in 2004 have demonstrated. Moreover, JI bombers now seem much more willing to create mass casualties among fellow Muslims by choosing so-called “soft targets” such as malls, hotels, and restaurants.

Structure

Ji is characterized by a depth of leadership that gives it a regenerative capacity.⁶ The Amir, who stands at the apex of Ji’s hierarchy, appoints and presides over governing, religious, fatwa, and disciplinary councils. The governing council is headed by a central command that sets policy and determines operations, and controls the leaders of the four mantiqis and the heads of wakalabs. Mantiqis resemble territorially based administrative structures and are equivalent to regions, while wakalabs correspond to districts.⁷ Each of the four regional divisions assumes different functions through independently operating cells. Mantiqi I cells cover Singapore and Malaysia and provide Ji with economic resources to support its operations; Mantiqi II cells operate in most of Indonesia, and consider the area to be the target area for jihadi operations; Mantiqi III covers Mindanao, Sabah, and Sulawesi and its cells are responsible for training; Mantiqi IV includes Papua and Australia and cells deal with fundraising. Radwan Issamudin, known as Hambali, was the overall head of the Mantiqis before his arrest in 2003.⁸

The senior Afghan veterans that constitute the core of Ji’s leadership try to recruit candidates from conflict areas, since these individuals will require little additional training. Participants can be recruited outside of the official structure, but

are usually a recycled group of experienced field commanders that are given two months extra training and then deployed to engage in bombing campaigns.⁹ In addition to ideology and the common Afghani experience that draws and inspires the organization’s core membership, an intricate network of arranged marriages between subordinates and leaders creates a “giant extended family” that helps keep the organization secure.¹⁰

Training

Training is essential to the military character of the Ji network. It provides a sense of purpose, expands its capabilities, increases religious fervor and commitment, and produces a new generation of fighters and instructors. Sungkar began sending groups of recruits to Afghanistan years before Ji formally came into being—an experience that shaped their worldview, provided them with combat skills, and formed a bond among the Indonesian trainees and members of Al Qaeda. All of Sungkar’s early followers trained in a camp led by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a mujahideen with close ties to the Saudi religious establishment and to Osama bin Laden, who at the time assisted with the international recruitment of mujahideen. The Afghan war and the Sayyaf camp became the training and bonding ground for most of Ji’s elite. There, they took extensive three-year military and religious courses, became experienced instructors, and encountered non-Indonesian fighters from Pakistan, the Philippines, and Egypt.¹¹

A Saudi funding shortage in 1995 forced Sungkar to relocate the Afghan training camps to the geographically closer southern Philippines. The new location also featured an Indonesian community able to provide a strong support structure to recruits. In 1996, Mukhlis,¹² an “Afghan alumnus” and now a commander of the Philippine Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), established a Ji cell within the MILF main base at Camp Abu Bakr. The location offered Ji ready access to weaponry, explosives and cheaper training facilities and provided Ji members with real combat experience through participation in the local Mindanao conflict.¹³ MILF and Ji operated on the principle of reciprocity, including

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the agreement that MILF would accommodate JI fighters in its camps. In return, JI was to assist the MILF in conducting bombings in the Mindanao conflict.¹⁴ The goal in establishing the camp was to replicate Afghanistan training as closely as possible, featuring the same instructors. The pre-selected recruits received an all-expenses-paid training that included military, engineering, self-defense and leadership instruction. An obligatory period of service to JI was thus created.¹⁵ After the Philippine armed forces destroyed Camp Abu Bakr in 2000, JI moved its training facilities to Poso, Central Sulawesi, where the Muslims practiced a more fundamental form of Islam, thus increasing the organization's ability to wage Jihad through increased recruiting and support.¹⁶

The conflicts in Maluku and Poso were critical to JI's recruitment strategy and, according to ICG, "those conflicts may have taken the place of Afghanistan and the southern Philippines as training centers, not just for Indonesian Islamic radicals but for non-Indonesians linked to JI as well."¹⁷ While the training in Afghanistan enjoyed international funding and nurtured within mujahideen an interest in global Muslim struggles, the Mindanao training was supported with local funds raised by Singaporean and Malaysian wakalahs that geared fighters toward participation in Indonesian conflicts.¹⁸ The overall purpose of the schooling in Afghanistan and Mindanao was to increase the capabilities of fighting Jihad in Indonesia.

Motivation and Recruitment

JI's foot soldiers are mostly composed of young men from pesantren or Islamic high schools inspired by religious teachers with ties either to the Darul Islam rebellions of the 1950's or to the Pondok Ngruki network.¹⁹ ICG believes that "school and marriages become two instruments for strengthening ties among mujahideen and at the same time ensuring that the jihadist ideology was passed down to a new generation."²⁰ The children of JI members attend the most prestigious pesantren and these same schools have come up repeatedly during interrogations of suspects. Marriages are a way to bring siblings and relatives into JI activities, and

the reliability of a wife is often a criterion for formal JI membership.²¹ The impeccable lineage of one's wife enhances a member's standing within the organization and increases his network potential.²²

Religious and financial incentives and the appeal of solidarity entice both well-educated and poor JI recruits from a variety of countries. Spiritual emptiness is the original incentive that attracts most young men to seek out charismatic preachers.²³ Many of the Singaporean JI members first looked for religious training to become better Muslims and became awed by Ibrahim Maidin, the leader of the Singaporean wakalah, and his participation in Afghanistan and Al Qaeda training. The members of this Singapore cell were not marginalized elements, but had found purpose through belonging to a radical cause, even one which was to be realized through terrorist violence.²⁴ Similarly, many of the Malaysian JI cell members were well educated with university degrees from American, British, and Malay universities, and at least five senior JI members and recruiters were lecturers at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).²⁵ Terrorism scholar Zachary Abuza believes that Ba'asyir ordered the Bali bombings to hurt the Indonesian economy, which in turn would attract people to religion and JI preaching.

Solidarity, i.e. empathy with the suffering of fellow Muslims, appears to be the primary incentive to participate in communal conflicts of Maluku and Poso. With few exceptions, attacks in these areas were directed at Christian priests and churches, and the "recruitment of foot soldiers was often preceded by discussions about Maluku and Poso or the showing of videos about the killings taking place there."²⁶ Imam Samudra, arrested for involvement in the Bali attack, reported his motives to avenge the death of Muslims in Afghanistan, Ambon, Poso and Bosnia, to punish the Australian intervention in

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East Timor and “to prove to Allah that we have done all we can to protect the weak Muslims and [that we] fought against oppressors.”²⁷ The foot soldier that planted explosives for the Christian bombing attacks in 2002 reported receiving 100,000 rupees as a monetary incentive for his involvement.²⁸

Financing

Zachary Abuza is convinced that Al Qaeda funds Jemaah Islamiyah’s Jihad operations. Much of the funding comes from charities where Al Qaeda inserted its own and top JI operatives into leadership positions to divert resources for terrorist purposes.²⁹ Even if Al Qaeda’s funding plays a limited role, JI members have capabilities to take advantage of the above financial resources

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independently. In addition to funds skimmed from Islamic charities throughout Southeast Asia, funding sources include profit from corporate entities, Al Qaeda’s investments and accounts already established in the region, and contributions from sympathizers and members themselves. Additional sources, equally difficult to intercept,

include cash transported by individuals, proceeds from hawala shops and weapons smuggling, and extortion.³⁰

Jl established an early alliance with criminal elements (preman) for the purposes of funding, logistics and additional manpower by incorporating into its teachings the practice of fa’i, robbing infidels to secure funds for defending the faith. Jl sought young men who lacked a criminal background but wanted to prove their courage and religious commitment by carrying out robberies.³¹ Preman assisted in arranging for Jl operatives’ border crossings, false identity documents, and transport of goods and people. Haris Fadillah, for example, father-in-law of Al Qaeda operative Omar al-Faruq, was a well known preman and debt collector from Indonesia,

who joined Darul Islam in 1996 and later became a Laskar Mujahideen commander in Ambon. He was particularly useful since he had connections to the Indonesian army, which was a good source for acquiring weapons.³² Jl accepts cooperation with preman to fulfill the goal of Jihad to allow sinners to repent. Criminals and gangsters can thus become mujahideen if they want to achieve God’s grace. As long as the ultimate end of waging Jihad in the defense of Islam is achieved, Jl accepts a large share of preman in its fighting forces.

Links with Al Qaeda

Scholars’ conclusions about the extent of Jl’s affiliation with the Al Qaeda network are contradictory. The International Crisis Group (ICG) believes that Jl follows Al Qaeda’s jihadist ideology and that the organization has a long period of shared experience in Afghanistan. However, it disputes that Jl is operating simply as an Al Qaeda subordinate because “virtually all of its decision making and much of its fund-raising has been conducted locally, and its focus, for all the claims about its wanting to establish a Southeast Asian caliphate, continues to be on establishing an Islamic state in Indonesia.”³³ The authors contend that Jl’s relationship with bin Laden’s organization is one of mutual advantage and reciprocal assistance, and can be compared to the relationship between an NGO and its funding agency. Jl submits proposals as an independent agent to the donor, and gets a grant when the proposal is accepted. In this case, Al Qaeda funds projects that correspond to its goals, but neither directs nor controls Jl.³⁴

Abuza, on the other hand, calls Al Qaeda Jl’s “parent organization” that trained and developed Jl operatives to make them the support personnel in its operations against Western targets in Southeast Asia.³⁵ As Al Qaeda’s affiliate organization in Southeast Asia, Jl developed its own capabilities, with Hambali and Jibril fundraising and putting together Laskar Mujahideen and the Laskar Jundullah to fight in Ambon and Poso in the late 1990’s. Furthermore, Al-Faruq also admitted having worked closely with Ba’asyir to plan Al Qaeda attacks by offering

logistical support and the services of JI operatives, a relationship which Ba'asyir denies.³⁶

In a similar vein, a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report declared that Al Qaeda operatives helped to create an indigenous, semi-autonomous, arm—a “mini-Al Qaeda.”³⁷ Sungkar and Ba'asyir “merged their evolving network into Al Qaeda and began setting up a sophisticated organizational structure while actively planning and recruiting for terrorism in [Southeast] Asia.”³⁸ In a possible support of this claim, Omar al-Farouq allegedly confessed to planning joint JI/Al Qaeda simultaneous bomb attacks in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Cambodia to commemorate the first anniversary of 9/11.³⁹

The complex web of interconnections between JI and Al Qaeda members makes it difficult to unravel each group's exact responsibility. Leading up to Bali, for example, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, made \$150, 000 available for the Bali operation, while Hambali delegated the planning and execution of the mission to JI commander Mukhlas.⁴⁰ From this account, it appears that Al Qaeda provided the funding, while JI carried out the mission. The lines between the two operations remain blurred, however, since Hambali and Mukhlas have ties to Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda also provided the initiative for JI plans to hit American targets in Singapore and relied on JI cell members to carry out video reconnaissance, target surveillance and procurement of explosive materials. Attesting to the vast resources of the JI network, Singaporean cell members borrowed talents of other cells for tasks they were unable to perform themselves.⁴¹ These charges could either point to a close relationship between Al Qaeda and JI, or to the JI's versatility in carrying out massive attacks outside of Indonesia.

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that JI leaders take advantage of strategically placed individuals through a range of networks and associations in Indonesia to wage Jihad in accordance with Abdullah Sungkar's teachings. JI's reach through Darul Islam followers, Pandok Ngruki alumni and its Malaysian counterpart, Pesantren Luqmanul Hakiem, is widespread. The

number of senior JI leaders might be small, but the linkages through family and old school ties are quite extensive.⁴²

Threat assessment

Although in the past several years the central command lost some of its top members and the organization experienced over two hundred arrests in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, JI remains extremely dangerous due to its wakalah network. While the pesantren are raising a new generation of Salafi jihadists, “the network of alliances, such as that between JI and the MILF in the Philippines or JI and Wahdah Islamiyah in South Sulawesi, means that even if JI members lie low for the time being, others can work with the large pool of trained cadres that exists outside the JI organization to undertake acts of violence.”⁴³

JI's greatest strength is its flexible guidelines for recruiting new members and establishing relations with other organizations. The General Guidelines for the Jemaah Islamiyah Struggle (PUPJI) manual proclaims that anyone who is a Muslim, subscribes to Salafi principles, practices a pure form of Islam devoid of corruption or innovation, and takes an oath administered by the Amir or his deputy, can become a JI member.⁴⁴ Moreover, JI can work with any other Islamic community that shares the same principles and goals, because “any leader of a mantiqi or wakalah can establish relations with other organizations with the permission of the amir, and any JI member can work with another organization with the approval of his mantiqi or wakalah leader.”⁴⁵ These rules allow JI to provide training and assistance to like-minded organizations in other parts of Indonesia, to work with MILF, Abu Sayyaf Group and Al Qaeda, and allow its members to participate in activities outside the JI command without having to compromise its jihadi mission.

JI's focus on “soft targets” like tourist venues instead of symbolic embassies indicates a strategic change in tactics rather than decreased

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organizational capabilities. While the arrests of Hambali, Mukhlis, al-Ghozi and other top JI commanders have seemingly diminished the group's ability to carry out large scale attacks, the apparently endless pool of foot soldiers, and myriad of connections with smaller groups, renders the organization still highly capable of lethal action. Geographic circumstance, lax border and financial controls, and weak reach of law enforcement make the movement of operatives and funds between Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines essentially trouble-free for JI.

Policy Recommendations

Indonesia must find a way to balance its religious domestic politics with American demands for greater cooperation against terrorism. Former President Megawati's administration hesitated calling JI a terrorist organization at home, because it worried about alienating Muslim voters ahead of the 2004 presidential elections.⁴⁶ The public is reluctant to acknowledge that terrorists have acted in the name of Islam, especially when Vice-President Haz, head of the Muslim-oriented United Development Party (PPP) denied the existence of terrorists and terrorism in Indonesia before the Bali bombings and was a big supporter of Ja'far Umar Thalib, founder of Laskar Jihad.⁴⁷ The government risks allowing Islamic fundamentalism to make further inroads in Indonesia if it fails to mobilize secular forces and moderate Muslim leaders in order to wrest the political and ideological agenda from the radicals.

An effective strategy to undermine the influence of political Islam in these communities requires first that one understand the JI phenomenon as an ideological struggle in competition with moderate forces for the hearts and minds of Muslims.⁴⁸ Public diplomacy is vital to the success of the war on terror. Soft power is one of the most important tools in the American toolbox to combat terrorism, and needs to be more frequently used in the regional ASEAN framework. Al Qaeda, JI and other groups that they support rely on a foundation of charities, non-governmental organizations, mosques, websites, and banks and financial institutions.⁴⁹

Although politically difficult, Southeast Asian governments need to enact stringent security and financial controls.

To improve the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism efforts abroad, Congress needs to ensure that Southeast Asian law enforcement agencies translate into a police force specializing in counterterrorism strategies. Such measures should be combined with a strengthened judicial system to legitimately convict terrorists in the eyes of the skeptical public.⁵⁰ Establishing professional and accountable police forces will include reforming and training judiciary to minimize corruption, and improving oversight over treasury, customs and immigration officials.⁵¹ The CRS report on terrorism in Southeast Asia concludes that "thwarting terrorist activities will require a coordinated, international response in a region where multinational institutions and cooperation are weak."⁵² Improving multinational intelligence sharing, border controls and extradition agreements will complicate JI's crossing national boundaries, sharing talents, and exploiting tensions arising from conflicting national jurisdiction throughout Southeast Asia.⁵³ If the Bush administration wants to succeed in its battle against JI's regional network, it should consider the following options:

- Strengthen regional security structures while simultaneously promoting the growth of judicial and democratic institutions in the region
- Examine the role of women and families in the JI network
- Engage in an aggressive public relations campaign to improve the image of the United States in Southeast Asia and the Middle East
- Endorse the adoption of stricter financial controls

These policies will complement and enhance U.S. efforts in combating the JI regional network.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

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⁴ *Ibid.*, 416-417.

⁵ Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 167.

⁶ ICG, *Asia Report No. 63, Jemaah Islamiyah In Southeast Asia: Damaged But Still Dangerous*, 26 August 2003, last accessed 14 May 2004. Available from http://www.crisisweb.org/library/documents/report_archive/A401104_26082003.pdf, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.* Some of the acts, like the Makassar bombings of 5 December 2002, were carried out by men who trained at Mindanao's JI camp.

¹⁰ ICG, *Asia Report No. 63*, executive summary.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹² In 2002, Mukhlis replaced Hambali as the leader of Mantiqi I.

¹³ Mike Winchester, "Philippine Terrorists; the ASG Still Bombing, Beheading, and Massacring," *Soldier of Fortune* 28, no. 6 (2003), 67.

¹⁴ ICG, *Asia Report No. 63*, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷ ICG, *Asia Report No. 43*, 2.

¹⁸ ICG, *Asia Report No. 63*, 23.

¹⁹ ICG, *Asia Report No. 43*, executive summary.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹ For examples of intermarriages between JI members, see ICG, *Asia Report No. 63*, 28.

²² ICG, *Asia Report No. 63* makes a note that there are few Philippine-Indonesian marriages, suggesting that the link between JI and MILF is reciprocal rather than institutional.

²³ *White Paper - The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and The Threat of Terrorism*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Republic of Singapore, 7 January 2003, last accessed 14 May 2004. Available from

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- ²⁴ Desker, 8.
- ²⁵ Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 134.
- ²⁶ ICG, Asia Report No. 43, executive summary.
- ²⁷ Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 167.
- ²⁸ ICG, Asia Report No. 43, 18.
- ²⁹ Zachary Abuza, "Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia," 2.
- ³⁰ Zachary Abuza, "Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: the Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 25, no. 2 (2003): 2.
- ³¹ ICG, Asia Report No. 63, 24.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 24-25
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ³⁵ Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 153.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- ³⁷ Congressional Research Service, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, updated November 18, 2003, last accessed 1 May 2004. Available from <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/27533.pdf>, 3.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6. This confession was attained in 2002 under a three-month CIA interrogation that throws some doubt on its authenticity.
- ⁴⁰ David M. Jones, Michael L.R. Smith, and Mark Weeding, "Looking for the Pattern: Al Qaeda in Southeast Asia – The Genealogy of a Terror Network," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26 (2003): 450.
- ⁴¹ Desker.
- ⁴² ICG, Asia Report No. 63, 25.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-12.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ The September 2004 election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) as Indonesia's new president makes it possible for the state to adopt a stronger counter terrorist position. He is considered an outspoken critic of Islamist terrorism, as a coordinating minister for security under President Megawati.
- ⁴⁷ Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (Ecco/HarperCollins, 2003), 64.
- ⁴⁸ Desker, 423.
- ⁴⁹ Zachary Abuza, "Funding terrorism in Southeast Asia," 2.
- ⁵⁰ Anthony Smith, "A Glass Half Full: Indonesia – U.S. relations in the Age of Terror," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 25, no. 3 (2003): 8. The Indonesian public questions the government's motives behind Ba'asyir's arrest that might have been orchestrated to please international opinion. See Tatik S. Hafidz, *The War on Terror and the Future of the Indonesian Democracy*, Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies Singapore No.46 (March 2003). Last accessed 14 May 2004. Available from <http://www.ntu.edu.sg/idss/WorkingPapers/WP46.pdf>.
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- ⁵² Congressional Research Service, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, 23.
- ⁵³ Desker, 426.