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LIU INSTITUTE FOR  
**GLOBAL ISSUES**

ANNEX 4

## **Workshop**

# **America in Question: Indonesian Democracy and the Challenge of Counter-terrorism in Southeast Asia**

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**HOW CONVERGENT ARE U.S. AND INDONESIAN VIEWS  
ON COMBATING TERRORISM?**

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## HOW CONVERGENT ARE U.S. AND INDONESIAN VIEWS ON COMBATING TERRORISM?

Sidney Jones

Not very -- it has to do with different perceptions of terrorism, different assessments of priority it should have, and different ideas about how to combat it

Views on how to combat terrorism obviously depend on how one sees the problem of terrorism in the first place so let's just take a quick look at the differences in perception.

I. On the Indonesian side, there are about 6 different views, and all of these are represented in the political elite as well as the public at large:

### **1. semua rekayasa**

The bombings in Indonesia have been engineered directly or indirectly by the U.S. and its allies for the purpose of either weakening Indonesia (the ultranationalists); or damaging the image of Islam in the interests of the Christian-Zionist alliance or neocolonialism or both. One commonly held view from Bali I through the present, particularly among some student groups, is that the bombings have to be rekayasa because Indonesians don't have the capacity to think these things up themselves.

### **2. it's all Malaysia's fault**

Yes, there's a problem, but it's the Malaysian government's fault for not having more control of their own nationals. Noordin and Azhari are the problem, and the Indonesians are just poor dupes.

### **3. teror kecil and teror besar**

What takes place in Indonesia is little terror -- the total number killed in acts of terror is relatively small. There's a larger problem that's not being addressed and that's state terrorism of the US against civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan and Israeli aggression against civilians in Palestine. You can't hope to eradicate the first if you don't address the second.

### **4. poverty and lack of economic opportunity are the root causes**

5. The fact that attacks still take place mean police and BIN have failed, we've got to reform these agencies.

6. Increasingly, after Bali II, there's acknowledgment in some quarters that there's a problem as well with the spread of an ideology that encourages attacks against Western civilians and Indonesian kafirs and thoghut officials on Indonesian soil. Very little discussion of how that ideology arose, what its other tenets are, or why it has taken root.

## II. American perceptions of the problem in Indonesia (from journalists, Congressional staffers, business types and university audiences)

1. Indonesians part of a global al-Q network where Indonesian terrorists are directed and controlled from Pakistan, Afghanistan or the Middle East.
2. The Indonesians are not doing their part because they won't ban JI, sentence Abu Bakar Ba'asyir to life in prison, or shut down problematic schools, or they're too afraid of a political backlash to take a strong stance against terror. Assumption that there's a silver bullet, and if you only did x,y, or z, the problem would be over.
3. It's all Saudi Arabia's fault and if you control Wahabism, you control terrorism  
(Commission on Religious Freedom)
4. the fatwa from the MUI, the attacks on churches and Ahmadiyah, and the strong showing of the PKS in the last election are all reflective of the growing radicalization of Indonesian Islam, of which the bombings are only the most extreme example.

Not very much understanding of what's actually been done.

### What About Stopping Terrorism?

I have no doubt that the overwhelming majority of Indonesians support efforts to prevent indiscriminate attacks on civilians. In the terror-free tomorrow poll – and I have serious questions about how some of the questions were phrased – it said in 2005, 35 percent opposed the US war on terror, 40 percent favored it and 24 percent didn't know. There was no effort to probe what the respondents thought the US was actually doing in this regard, but the 40 percent figure may reflect that desire to stop the bombings.

That said, there are very different views on what measures are needed. Indonesians tending to see counterterrorism as catching criminals, as primarily law enforcement: strengthening laws, like the anti-terror laws; pursuing the men responsible for acts of violence; or improving the intelligence capacity that will enable them to prevent attacks. Indonesian officials have generally welcomed assistance to the police, for example, and few in the general public see that as controversial.

Americans tend to see it as changing ideas, and that's where they run into problems. There's an obsession in Washington with this horrible notion of "a battle for the soul of Islam" one of the single most overused clichés in current use. There's no question that the ideology of salafi jihadism is part of the problem but every time an American official opens his mouth to discuss Islamic ideology he puts his foot in it.

There's a tendency to equate radicalism with violence and violence with terrorism and lump together all sorts of different things that are very different. (Just for example, Hizbut Tahrir is radical but not violent, FPI is violent but not terrorist.)

There's resentment here not only at these lack of distinctions but at the tendency of US officials to willfully ignore the extent to which their own policies are responsible for the spread of the ideology.

Many Indonesian Muslims believe that Americans, in the name of counter-terror, are trying to discredit the whole notion of jihad by suggesting that all forms of violence in the name of jihad should be banned, whereas jihad in defence of Muslims under attack is a critical element of faith. As one writer notes in a recent article, you have to distinguish Bali and Jakarta from Iraq and Palestine<sup>1</sup>, where jihad is legitimate, and indeed the major message coming out of the team handling terrorism in the Department of Religion is that jihad is fine in conflict areas, but Indonesia is not a conflict area.

Announcements in the Indonesian press of US assistance to Muslim schools in the wake of Bush's 2003 visit, combined with statements of US officials on Islam and terror that are closely monitored in the press and Muslim websites here have given rise to perceptions that US counter-terror policy is all about arresting radical clerics, banning radical books, secularising religious education, and putting mosques and schools under surveillance, not just in Indonesia but around the world. (Often reports of assistance are so badly distorted that they bear little relation to reality -- for example, an article posted on eramuslim website that the US ambassador to Egypt had offered a \$150 million 'bonus' to al-Azhar to introduce courses on comparative religion.)

*[Increasingly, military analysts in the Pentagon and other countries see counter-terrorism as a new form of counterinsurgency.*

*They argue that jihadists in different organizations around the world constitute "a popular movement that seeks to change the status quo through violence and subversion. [...] The scale of the Islamist agenda is new, but their grievances and methods would be familiar to any insurgent in history."<sup>2</sup>*

*According to this analysis, the insurgency lacks a unified organisation, instead operating through "aligned independent movements"; it controls no territory but rather operates through a "Islamist virtual state"; and the network is maintained through cyberspace and international communication technologies. Like more conventional insurgencies, once it reaches a critical mass, it becomes self-sustaining and "removing the initial cause [...] will not cause it to wither."<sup>3</sup>*

*The advantage of thinking of global jihadism as an insurgency, the analysis continues, is not just that it focuses on understanding and disrupting the insurgents' strategy, rather than on simply arresting individual perpetrators. It also focuses on understanding and addressing grievances, winning hearts and minds, and treating insurgents not as*

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<sup>1</sup> Denny Kodrat, Syariah, Khalifah dan Jihad, al-Wa'ie, No, 65 Th VI, January 2006.

<sup>2</sup> David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency", Canberra, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

*psychopaths but as rebels who can be reintegrated and rehabilitated as part of a settlement.*<sup>4</sup>

*But treating jihadism as insurgency justifies military action in areas where situations where law enforcement might be more effective. (Had the military rather than the police been in charge of the counter-terror program in Indonesia, there would have been serious ramifications for Indonesia's democratic transition – and the results are not likely to have been as good.)*

*Moreover, looking at all the various groups in the network as part of a loosely aligned whole tends to obscure their very local characteristics and the possible divisions within them. If only one faction in JI supports attacking Western targets, for example, then using military means to go after the organisation could serve to radicalise the other faction and make the problem worse.]*

Interestingly, there has been very little attention or concern about the US snatching non-Indonesians from Indonesia, and not nearly as much concern as there should be over where Hambali is detained or why the Indonesian police have not been allowed to see him.

In general, there's more convergence than there was two years ago, but there are some fundamental divides that are not easily overcome.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.19.