3 New Order Repression and the Birth of Jemaah Islamiyah

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One argument about Islamic extremism goes something like this: among Sunni Muslims, particularly over the last two decades, one can find three strands of activism: religious outreach or *dakwah* to make Muslims better Muslims or convince them to purify their practices; political activism, or non-violent efforts to achieve power by political means; and jihadism, involving the use of violence to overthrow corrupt regimes, reclaim occupied land or wage war against the enemies of Islam, including the U.S. and its allies (ICG 2005). The surest way of encouraging jihadism is to cut out the possibility of political participation for Islamist organisations. Reduced to its simplest terms, governments with majority Muslim populations risk fuelling jihadism through repression. A corollary is that the cure for violent extremism is democracy that gives a voice to radical Islamists.

Although a nice theory, it has actually not been widely tested, and at first glance, Indonesia seems the perfect refutation. After all, it was only after Soeharto fell and the political system opened up that JI began to engage in acts of violence on Indonesian soil. But if we go back to the 1970s, it gets more interesting, because it was under the Soeharto government at this time that three factors came together in a way that ultimately produced the Bali bombers.

One issue was the decision by the Indonesian intelligence agency BAKIN to help resuscitate Darul Islam (DI) at a critical juncture in the early New Order. The original DI had largely collapsed after the arrest and execution of its leader, S.M. Kartosoewirjo, in 1962. Surviving leaders of the movement had come together on their own, but BAKIN provided critical funding, in the hope that the DI network would become a Golkar asset. That was not New Order repression; it was New Order hubris that it could control and co-opt an organisation that had fought the Indonesian state for more than a decade in the 1950s and early 1960s. It was a revived DI that was later to give JI much of its organisational base inside Indonesia.

But the second factor was the suppression of Muslim political parties in a way that not only denied Indonesian Islamists any role in the government but made them the target of active repression, particularly in the lead up to the 1971 elections. It is questionable whether a man like Abdullah Sungkar, JI's founder, would have made common cause with DI if the New Order government had allowed a party like Masyumi, the largest Muslim party before its banning by Sukarno in 1960, or any party headed by Mohammad Natsir, to function freely.

The third was the direct result of the first two: the grafting on to a revived insurgency of that disenfranchised Islamist elite's attributes, including an internationalist outlook, access to funds and contacts, salafist inclinations, and intellectual power. The Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII), founded by Natsir in 1967, had all those characteristics, and the fusion of DI and DDII proved potent. Banning independent Muslim parties also meant the removal of any meaningful political role for the youth organisations that shared their goals, such as the Indonesian Youth Movement (Gerakan Pemuda Islam, GPI) and Indonesian Islamic Youth (Pemuda Islam Indonesia, PII)—hence the attraction of a militant, clandestine movement that the fused DI-Sungkar alliance became.

By itself, DI could not have produced JI. It was a parochial, ideologically unsophisticated guerrilla movement with no significant international connections. Without the New Order restrictions on political expression that propelled a highly educated, modernist Muslim urban elite into its arms, DI would have remained an ongoing but very localised problem. So here are two imponderables. If Indonesia's democratic transition had begun in the 1980s instead of the 1990s, would we still have JI? And if we still have JI seven years after Soeharto's downfall, does that mean that the thesis that political liberalisation helps curb terrorism is wishful thinking, or is there a time lag that has to be factored in before the effects of liberalisation are felt?

Examining the three factors mentioned above may help provide answers.

The resuscitation of DI

One of the worst mistakes made by the Soeharto government was Ali Moertopo's decision, against the better judgment of others in BAKIN, to help revive and consolidate the DI leadership in 1971 (Conboy 2006:16–19). Moertopo and others, including Col. Pitut Suharto, thought they could use DI as a tool for bringing in the Golkar vote and promoting an anti-Communist stance at the same time. After all, here was an organisation that BAKIN thought it controlled and that had a clear constituency in Java, which was the real target of BAKIN's

efforts to create the Golkar machine. It had proven anti-Communist credentials and at least one senior leader—Danu Muhammad Hasan—was on the BAKIN payroll (Pranoto 1978:32).

The political protection and the money given to DI at that stage paved the way for the re-establishment of a national base for the organisation, or at least one that extended to Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi. It set in motion events that led to the establishment of Komando Jihad in Sumatra, the disillusionment of DI with Moertopo's promises, and the discovery of shared interests between DI and other opponents of Soeharto's rule, particularly from the ex-Masyumi camp.

Darul Islam came back to life as an organisation, one dedicated to the establishment of an Islamic state, just before the government forced existing Muslim parties to amalgamate in January 1973, thus creating the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP). Its revival also preceded a critical debate began in Indonesia over a proposed marriage law that would have allowed Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men and had other provisions that were anathema to the Muslim puritans in Indonesia. These issues clearly left their mark on the organisation.

But as late as 1976, with the 1977 elections on the horizon, Moertopo reportedly believed he could still use former DI members as a machine to turn out Golkar votes, and was unperturbed by the fact that DI had used the political space available to form a military organisation that engaged in a series of attacks on civilian targets from Medan to Solo, later to become known as Komando Jihad (Conboy 2006:16–19). All of BAKIN's contacts were with the generation of men who surrendered after 1962; it appeared to be oblivious to the fact that these men had taken advantage of widespread unhappiness in Muslim ranks to recruit a new generation; that the DI message had already spread beyond its original base; and that the old and new members were anything but supportive of the New Order.

One of the people drawn into DI in the mid-1970s was Timsar Zubil, then secretary of the North Sumatra branch of a Masyumi-affiliated student group, PII. In 1976, Timsar launched one of the first salvos in the Komando Jihad campaign, the bombing of a movie theatre and two churches in Medan. He was tried and sentenced to death in 1978, had his sentence commuted to life, and was released in 1999 when Habibie freed political prisoners. In an interview in 2001, he cited several factors for why DI decided in 1976 to apply 'shock therapy' to the New Order in the form of these bombings. These included the formation of the PPP and the dissolution of parties with a genuine mass Islamic base; the refusal of the Soeharto government to recognise the results of the

Parmusi¹ election in 1974 and its retention of a discredited party leadership; the controls placed on preaching activities and other Islamic gatherings; and almost as an afterthought, the spread of vice and dens of iniquity (*tempat maksiat*) (*Darul Islam* January-February 2001:28–30). The political element was clear. Parenthetically, it is also interesting that he chose a few churches to bomb—an action for which he apologised for many years later. But it suggests that the influence of DDII—an organisation with a strong anti-Christian streak—was already beginning to make itself felt on the DI organisation.

The Sungkar factor

It was Abdullah Sungkar who embodied the DI-DDII connection as much as anyone else. A member of a long-established, relatively well-to-do family of Yemeni extraction involved in the batik trade, Sungkar's relationship with DDII Solo almost certainly preceded his involvement with DI. As a student, he had been a member of GPI, one of the more radical student organisations; he would have been directly affected by the banning of Masyumi in 1960, when he was 23.

He and Ba'asyir joined forces in 1967 to set up a radio station in Solo that was shut down by the New Order in 1975 for its anti-government harangues. In March 1977, he was arrested without warrant or charge and detained in Semarang for 48 days for urging his followers not to vote in that year's elections—among other things because the Soeharto government did not allow two candidates who should have been running, in his view, Mohammed Natsir and Mohammed Roem, on the ballot.²

Both men had been prominent Masyumi leaders and were the natural choices to head a new party, the Partai Muslimin Indonesia (Parmusi), that Soeharto reluctantly allowed to emerge in 1968. But because Natsir and a few other Masyumi notables—not Roem—had supported a regional rebellion in West Sumatra in 1958, Soeharto refused to countenance any political revival of Masyumi as an institution or its former leaders as individuals. The condition for Parmusi's creation was that no one from Masyumi have a leadership role. Roem was nevertheless elected general chairman in late 1968. In 1970, prior to the 1971 elections, Soeharto engineered his ouster, replaced him with a pliant apparatchik, and in 1973 forced the merger of Parmusi and other Islamic parties to form the PPP (Ward 1970; Samson 1973).

1 Parmusi (Partai Muslimin Indonesia) was the 'successor' party to Masyumi.

2 'Ideologi Negara Pancasila Gerakan Komunisme dan Ajaran Islam didepan Sidang Pengadilan Negeri Sukoharjo: Suatu Eksepsi', 20 Februari 1982 and in Berita Acara Pemeriksaan Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abdullah Sungkar, No.1/Pid.Subv/1982/P.N. Skh. In his defence plea, Sungkar denies urging others not to vote but defends his own decision not to take part.

Sungkar was fiercely political, and had genuinely independent Islamic political parties been allowed under the New Order, he almost certainly would have signed up. At the trial of Sungkar and Ba'asyir in 1982, the prosecutor accused the two men of not raising the Indonesian flag raising at their school, Pesantren al-Mukmin, better known as Pondok Ngruki, as all schools were required to do. They were also accused of not inviting the village head to attend events there; of undermining Pancasila; and of holding religious study sessions (*pengajian*) where they slandered Indonesian officials and urged villagers to disobey man-made, as opposed to Islamic, law. Soeharto's intelligence apparatus had plants at these sessions who instantly reported back to the district military command.

Sungkar used his defence plea to blast the New Order for what he considered to be its sins since it came to power in 1966. The long list represents as trenchant a criticism of the New Order as many of the documents produced by the 1978 student movement, which had been crushed four years earlier (Akhmadi 1981). It included:

- Engineering the 1970 'coup' against the Parmusi leadership;
- 'Hijacking' of another Muslim party, United Islam Indonesia Party (Partai Serikat Islam Indonesia, PSII) in 1972. PSII's leader at the time was opposed to the creation of the PPP, so, according to Sungkar, Ali Moertopo engineered his removal and broadcast the manipulated election on national television. Sungkar contrasts this with the government's more subtle intervention in 1970 in the Congress of the old Sukarnoist Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI.)
- Manipulating political parties in general;
- Controlling mass organisations, including those representing journalists, farmers, fishermen, workers and youth. Sungkar documents how the New Order, in the name of creating professional federations, succeeded in creating monolithic 'fusions' that served as an arm of the government. Regarding the founding of the National Indonesian Youth Committee (Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia, KNPI), he notes that the only organisations that did not join were the two associated with the old Masyumi: Indonesian Youth Movement (Gerakan Pemuda Indonesia, GPI) and PII;
- Controlling parliament, so that only after political parties had been brought into line was an election law passed that gave the Indonesian Armed Forces 100 appointed seats;
- Manipulating the 1971 and 1977 elections and the blacklisting of 2,500 former members of the Masyumi party;
- Introducing the concept of 'mono-loyalty' for civil servants, meaning they had no choice other than to support Golkar, the New Order's political machine;

- Carrying out arrests, detentions, torture, rape and other violations against members of political parties during the 1971 campaign. (Here he cites Abraham Lincoln—except that it was actually circus founder, PT Barnum—that ‘you can fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.’)³
- Failing to apply the Jakarta Charter, which would constitutionally require Muslims to carry out Islamic law;
- Cynically controlling, through the Ministry of Religion of the pilgrimage to Mecca at the same time its officials were going overseas and engage in gambling, prostitution, and adultery without any restrictions;
- Refusing to release students from school during Ramadan the Muslim fasting month;
- Holding the closing ceremonies of the 1979 Asian Games in Jakarta at a time that coincided with evening prayer and drew children to television sets instead of the mosque;
- Placing schools and mosques and all religious activities under the surveillance of the internal security apparatus, Kopkamptib;
- Treating Pancasila and government symbols like the flag as sacred and turning Indonesia into a totalitarian state;
- Encouraging animism and primitive beliefs. This was a reference to the government’s 1977 decision to recognise Javanese beliefs (*aliran kepercayaan*) as being consistent with ‘belief in one God’, the first principle of Indonesia’s state ideology, Pancasila (Bresnan 1993:194–97);
- Closing the old Masyumi newspaper *Harian Abadi* in 1974 while Catholic and Protestant newspapers like *Kompas* and *Sinar Harapan* are allowed to continue;
- Detaining Muslim preachers who criticise the government. Among several names mentioned are Syafruddin Prawiranegara and AM Fatwa, individuals involved in the ‘Petition of 50’, a 1980 statement critical of Soeharto;
- The dissolution of student organisations in 1978 by Daud Joesoef, then education minister; and
- Passing the 1974 marriage law, noted above.

It is difficult to imagine anyone from the circle of Kartosoewirjo’s ex-fighters serving up such a detailed political rant. This does not sound like Darul Islam—it sounds more like what it was, the complete frustration of an Islamist politician decisively and permanently excluded from the system. The only thing missing is a call to revolution.

3 Sungkar defence plea, 1982, p.8.

That is where DI comes in. By the time he read out that statement in court, Sungkar had been a DI member for at least six years and in detention for half that time. At some stage, he must have consciously decided to use DI as a vehicle for bringing down the Soeharto government, especially since it offered a national network, an unimpeachable legacy and mystique, and a cadre of experienced guerrillas. There is no evidence that Sungkar had any immediate plans for armed rebellion—he was too smart for that, and in any case most of the DI leadership had been arrested in a crackdown between 1978 and 1982. But the Soeharto government's treatment of him and other political activists set him on a course of active opposition, using the DI structure to build an Islamic base through a cadre recruitment program pioneered by the Muslim Brotherhood's Hasan al-Banna called *usroh*.

Sungkar and Ba'asyir were sentenced to nine years but released on a technicality almost as soon as their trial concluded, and they had two years to try and build their base, mostly in Central Java and Jakarta, before the prospect of re-arrest loomed. At that point, the two men fled to Malaysia.

In Malaysia, the DI-DDII-ex-Masyumi alliance comes full circle. One of Sungkar and Ba'asyir's first visitors was Abdul Wahid Kadungga, a DDII activist, personal secretary to Natsir and, for good measure, the son-in-law of the leader of the DI rebellion in South Sulawesi, Kahar Muzakkar (Conboy 2006:42–43; ICG 2003). Kadungga had just come from meeting with Abdullah Azzam in Pakistan at a time when Saudi money was beginning to become available in large quantities to send foreign fighters to Afghanistan. The money was channelled through the Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami, the World Muslim League, and its vice-president was Natsir, Kadungga's boss.

Thus began Sungkar's program of sending Indonesians for training to Afghanistan, financed by the Rabitat, with the aim of building up the capacity of Indonesian Muslims to take on the Soeharto government militarily. The first batch of recruits, including Zulkarnaen, the man who became head of Jemaah Islamiyah's military operations, were not DI members. They were GPI members who only later joined DI.

If it had been only ex-fighters of the DI rebellion in West Java, Aceh, or South Sulawesi who had gone to Malaysia in 1985 (and there were some), would they have been able to build the base among Malaysians and Singaporeans that Sungkar and his followers succeeded in doing? Probably not—there were few in DI ranks, at least of that generation, that had the religious knowledge or political savvy of Sungkar. The men he brought with him to Malaysia were mostly from the Yogya-Solo area who honed their preaching skills at a mosque associated with Gajah Mada University, one of Indonesia's premier secular institutions, and were well-versed in the writings of al-Banna and al-Maududi.

That internationalist outlook almost certainly ended up being a factor in the ability to recruit non-Indonesians—a factor that was to have major implications for the growth of JI.

The disaffection of the 1980s and the *usroh* movement

The explosion of the *usroh* movement on Indonesian college campuses in the late 1970s and early 1980s further fused the DI and Islamist agendas. The idea, first proposed by Hasan al-Banna of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, was to gather groups of ten to fifteen people—called *usroh*, ('family' in Arabic)—who were prepared to live strictly according to Islamic law. If enough *usroh* groups were formed, they could constitute the building blocks of an Islamic state. The idea took hold in 1977, when apparently independently, two groups circulated manuals on how to form *usroh* groups. One was a network of mosque-based youth in which GPI and PII were well represented, which quickly drew in university-based activists; the other was the Ngruki pesantren, which took the lead in forming *usroh* groups in Central Java.

The movement's popularity can be understood in part as the consequence of having no other vehicles for political expression at a time when there was huge ferment in the Muslim world—and the formation of these groups exploded exponentially after the Iranian revolution of 1979. If political parties had been allowed to exist, *usroh* might have led to the creation of something akin to the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Prosperous and Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) twenty years earlier, without any association with DI. But Sungkar and Ba'asyir, who began forming *usroh* groups before they fled to Malaysia, understood the potential of what was effectively the creation of a cell structure for religious and political objectives, and they turned it into a recruitment mechanism for DI.

The movement reached its height between 1983 and 1985, a consequence both of the Iranian revolution, and of the anger against the Soeharto government for its declaration in 1984 that henceforth only Pancasila and not Islam or any other religion or ideology, could serve as the ideological basis for mass organisations in Indonesia.

Testimony from JI members arrested in 2003 for trying to recruit and train a new special forces unit in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombs attests to the importance of these groups in the mid- to late 1980s for bringing new people into the DI organisation, including many who were later sent to Afghanistan or Mindanao for training, or who ended up fighting in the conflicts in Ambon and

Poso. They tapped into grievances of Islamist organisations whose exclusion from the body politic was, if anything, even more pronounced than it had been a decade earlier.

Conclusion

At the height of the New Order, then, we have the organisation that was later to become JI taking shape. Darul Islam gave it the historical tradition, a basic structure, and the goal of creating an Islamic state in Indonesia; Sungkar and DDII gave it the puritanical inclination and the internationalist outlook. The *usroh* gave it a new kind of cell structure and a method of recruitment. That conjoining of factors was, if not caused by, at least facilitated by the lack of other independent organisations that could channel anti-government and Islamist aspirations.

So, there are two questions left: if the New Order had not destroyed political parties—or continued the destruction begun by Sukarno—would JI exist today?

The war in Afghanistan would still have occurred; Indonesians would still have gone there to train. But the non-DI people went by and large to help the Afghans—not to acquire the capacity to take on Soeharto. They returned as individuals, without any particular incentive to marshal their skills for an organisational goal, although the bond among them was such that someone with determination and charisma might well have been able to mobilise them for collective action.

Communal conflicts in places like Ambon and Poso would still have erupted and militias mobilised along religious lines would still have emerged. This would almost certainly have created local militias like the Makassar-based Laskar Jundullah, but it is highly unlikely whether such conflicts by themselves could have generated a transnational organisation.

DI would still have existed, and DI will still splinter for a long time to come. But whether men like Sungkar and the first generation of Afghan alumni would have been drawn into DI, and whether DI would have been drawn into salafi jihadism, if the New Order had been less repressive, is another question.

Sungkar and others who joined DI in the late 1970s were reacting to more than just the New Order's stifling insistence on political control. Political Islam was defined as the enemy, the extreme right, juxtaposed with Communism, the extreme left. Islamic books and newspapers were banned, activists calling for application of Islamic law arrested. The recognition of Javanese beliefs as a

religion was a calculated move by Soeharto's advisers to reduce the percentage of people identifying themselves as Muslim and therefore the level of government assistance to mosques and Islamic schools (Liddle 1978). The association of 'pure Islam' with regional rebellions was still very much present in the minds of Soeharto and his military advisers more than 20 years after the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (Pemerintah Revolusi Republik Indonesia, PRRI) rebellion in West Sumatra—and Moertopo's courting of the West Java DI members notwithstanding. What some ex-Masyumi members were experiencing was not just a curb here and there on freedom of expression or political participation; it was systematic persecution. And it backfired more dramatically than Soeharto or Moertopo ever could have imagined.