

TRUSCOTT

Crisis Leaders

OPERATION TONGUE AND TEETH

The Battle for the Soul of SE Asian Islam

By

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Al-Qaeda in all of its forms and subsidiaries has proven that it can, on often strategically timed occasions, carry out simultaneous attacks in multiple cities in two countries. It has sown terror and ratcheted up conflict between Muslims and Muslims, Muslims and Christians, playing both, even all sides off each other to the point that an Islamic revolution may still be within their reach.

The fertile seedbed of such revolution remains the chaotic environment of degraded, divided, corrupt and at worst, failing or failed states. Some thoroughly modern commentators have viewed terrorism as military strategy but of course it is more than that. It cannot be simply parcelled up as just the have-nots versus the haves. Terrorism may be labelled as the most cost-effective, harshest form of both tactical and strategic psychological operations available to the apparent weaker force. As Napoleon Bonaparte instructed, the mental to the physical is as three to one.

Set against the carbonised framework of Islamic fundamentalism, in particular, the psychological effect of terrorism gains true edge, with at least the momentary leverage of fanaticism. It is at once both a military and, more importantly, a major political weapon of the weaker in these days of free, global, multi-mass-media. Now the historical propaganda of the deed has become the tactical strike with global consequences. Our information-saturated environment has enabled and empowered the proponents of the war of the flea to engage simultaneously multiple/mass stakeholders across international cultural, sovereign, racial, and religious borders.

These days it could be said that it is not so much the actual methodology or individual acts that are the main issue. After all, beheading has been around, even state institutionalised, as a cheap low-tech killing method for as long as there has been sharp implements; and for those weak flea-forces that do not have any artillery, it could be said that roadside bombs and suicide bombers are again merely a cost-effective way to introduce high explosive destructive power into the ranks and rear echelons of the enemy. No, it is indeed the apparent random callous targeting of the soft, vulnerable, non-engaged and unprotected sections of our societies, both Muslim and Christian, that is the real terror.

Let's talk about operations. Practically speaking, there is little difference between al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah, with the latter operating in many ways as a subsidiary of the former. The Bali bombing indeed contained the work of al-Qaeda, which provided directional assistance, funds, training, and some of the personnel to supplement Jemaah Islamiyah's home-grown recruiting. It was on orders from al-Qaeda that Jemaah Islamiyah switched from Plan A in Singapore to Plan B in Bali.

The ease with which massive amounts of explosives can be obtained to kill hundreds of people and the relatively efficient simplicity of the terrorists' plans, make it a virtual certainty that such shocking attacks will continue. With the world's most hostile places awash with personal weapons, and with caches of Ammonium Nitrate everywhere, how do you 'drain the swamp', to quote Paul Wolfowitz, before Plan C takes place in Jalan Gatot Subroto? Can such a hydra-headed monster be defeated when its cells function within a flat, informal but compartmented, transnational infrastructure, when the good majority of counter terrorism efforts are nationally based, hierarchical and in a global sense, mostly disconnected and, for the large part, uncoordinated?

Jemaah Islamiyah's leaders have created a clandestine umbrella organization known as Rabitatul Mujahidin, which includes all the armed Muslim groups in the region; the MILF, Abu Sayyaf, Laskar Jundullah, and several others. Although each of these groups has a separate leadership structure, they act essentially as part of the Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaeda terror network.

Like al-Qaeda, the policy making body of Jemaah Islamiyah is known as the regional *shura*, or leadership council. It has five divisions: Missionary, Training and Jihad, Economics, Front Organizations, and International Affairs. The Missionary division is responsible for recruitment. Training and Jihad focuses on creating army units and on funnelling members to trouble spots. Economics collects Muslim tithes and channels money through various companies. Front Organizations funnels money through non-governmental organizations. While International Affairs focuses on relations between al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah, particularly in Malaysia.

Jemaah Islamiyah has further divided the region into four territorial groups called mantiqis: Mantiqi 1 covers Malaysia, Singapore and Southern Thailand; Mantiqi 2 covers all of Indonesia except Sulawesi and Kalimantan; Mantiqi 3 covers the Philippines, Brunei, the East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, Sulawesi and Kalimantan in Indonesia; and finally Mantiqi 4 covers Irian Jaya and Australia. Each of these groups has its own versions of the five Jemaah Islamiyah divisions.

On the ground, when faced with the military and legal onslaught of the various national counter terrorist efforts in the region, the terrorist operatives – the heads of the hydra – will often appear to regenerate and even replenish. When one is arrested, three seem to take his place. While clearly depleted in expertise, experience and some key leadership elements through this sometimes relentless attrition, Jemaah Islamiyah also understands that it is the psychological battle which is the most fierce, with the largest prize, the political prize, going to the victor.

Clearly the West has not done enough to fight ideology with a comprehensively better ideology. Law enforcement and military action are not enough and there is a fundamental need to seek the support of moderate Muslims around the world to cage an amorphous enemy that uses Muslim language and traditions to inspire a primal response. As long as such radical ideology has appeal and remains unchallenged, the Islamic fundamentalism that has penetrated the socio-economic, cultural and religious fabric of Muslim societies will spawn and sustain violence.

Here is the brutal fact. It is actually the moderate mainstream Muslim world, not the relatively more armoured and organised West, which is the chief immediate strategic target of the global jihadists. It is thus from within the ranks of such countries as Egypt, Saudi, Jordan, even the New Iraq in the Middle East, and such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in SE Asia that the main thrust of the counter offensive must come, firstly ideologically, then followed and supported by legal and military operations. This reality poses the most significant challenge for the West: how to win without leading?

On one facet, the global war on terrorism is as much about its rebound impact upon western values as it is about the projection or otherwise of western military might. Fighting a purely singular and leading military/law enforcement campaign will mean the potential destruction of those values by the slow erosion of domestic and increasingly international civil liberties. It will also diabolically support al-Qaeda aims by assisting to create an Islamic-Infidel divide. Persuading Islamic countries to understand and work with western values, and perhaps more importantly, persuading western societies to also understand and work with Islamic values, is the only sustainable solution. It will necessarily be lengthy and very comprehensive, and definitely not over by Christmas.

Dealing with the new would-be caliphate, the new pretender, the false successor of Mohammed in the Mantiqi, can only be achieved, slowly but surely, by engaging and perhaps even encouraging self-inspiration of the Muslim 20 percent of the world. Durable solutions will require significant social re-engineering appropriate to their own mores, in addition to their employing clandestine umbrella organizations in the Muslim way to defeat ideology with better ideology. To book its own subsequent survival and, indeed, opportunities, the West must not merely master the application of Special Operations and psychological cooperation and assistance to prospective moderate Muslim and more secular partners but do it quickly and across cultures. New skills are needed.

The al-Qaeda Manual's preamble is blunt. "Islamic governments have never and will never be established through peaceful solutions and cooperative councils. They are established, as they have always been by pen and gun, by word and bullet, by tongue and teeth." Ironically, this revolutionary mantra for al-Qaeda's political success also forms the means of their destruction. It must be through both means, through both Teeth and Tongue, that the battles to come are fought and must be won.

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