Why No One is Safe

By Tim Lindsey

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In the aftermath of the Jakarta blast, Australia and Indonesia find themselves again joined in tragedy.

This bombing seems to have been specifically aimed at Australia but all the victims have been Indonesian, and most were probably Muslims.

And this raises the question of why the terrorists who perpetrated this atrocity, the Marriott hotel bombing and the Bali bombings, are willing to indiscriminately kill their own people.

This is a more important question than it seems because the answer reveals much about the motivation and objectives of Jemaah Islamiah and the other shadowy groups that produce Indonesia's bombers.

First, it is certainly the case that Muslim terrorists see their actions as part of a crusade or jihad against Christian or secular nations of "the West".

They believe the US and its allies have conspired to wage a war against Islam in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq.

They want to avenge themselves on the West, punish its people and force them to pull out of the Middle East, especially Palestine and the Saudi Arabian holy land.

There can also now be no doubt that by its strong support for US policy in these places, Australia has become a major target, as al-Qaida recently confirmed.

Whether or not our policies have been justified (and I believe they often have not) we are in the firing line now.

The motivating power of holy war against the US and its allies is well-known but it tends to mask a second, and sometimes more important, motivation to create a pan-South-East Asian Islamic state.

Fighting the US gives little reason to be prepared to kill Indonesians, but this second objective directly justifies it.

We know that JI seeks to create a Dar-ul Islam (abode of Islam) in our region that would embrace Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, East Timor, the Philippines and even the north of Australia.
In different, usually less ambitious, forms this has been a long-standing objective of Islamic extremists in Indonesia.

JI's direct predecessor was a Dar-ul Islam movement that actually set up a pseudo-state in mountains near Jakarta in the early 1950s and fought a decade-long war with the republic.

The new pan-Islamic plan unites fanatics from all around the region.

It is, for example, why the Indonesian co-founders of JI, Abu Bakar Bashir and Abu Sangkar, were able to grow JI in Malaysia and recruit mujahidin for Afghanistan from there in the 1980s and 1990s.

It is why JI has been able to operate training camps in the southern Philippines.

It is also why the new leadership of JI in Indonesia is dominated by Malaysians like Dr Azahari Husin, the notorious bomb maker, and Mohammad Noordin Top, both of whom are suspected of masterminding the latest Jakarta blast.

But to create a South-East Asian Islamic caliphate, the militants must, of course, first topple existing states.

They aim to do this by destabilising them with terror attacks that paint regional governments as unable to protect their citizens and create an atmosphere of fear, mistrust and panic.

The more Indonesians the terrorists kill, the more likely they are to destabilise governments, terrify the population and break down the structures of secular society.

And so, as they kill and maim more and more Indonesians, they believe they are making progress.

And maybe they are.

Events such as the Bali bombing are devastating enough for Australians but we can always choose not to travel overseas.

Ordinary Indonesians do not have that choice.

Many now fear that, like the taxi drivers of the Marriott, the schoolchildren passing the embassy last week, the young waiters at the Sari Club or shoppers in the many malls that have been hit, they could be killed at any time by fanatics whom they regard as deranged and, in fact, as enemies of their religion.

The irony for JI is that the growing terror they are creating among Indonesians means that one outcome of the embassy bomb will probably be to deliver the Indonesian presidency to Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.
A former general whom many believe will use a military crackdown to deal with Islamic terrorism, he now seems certain to win the election next Monday.

This may be bad news for JI but, sadly, a return to army-led government will also be bad news for Indonesia's fledgling liberal democracy.

The other likely outcome of the Jakarta bomb is better news.

There can be no doubt that it will bring Australia and Indonesia even closer together.

It will cement the superb job our public servants - and, in particular, the Federal Police - have done in continuing the intimate and effective co-operation they established after the Kuta massacre in 2002.

This matters because, in the end, joint forensice investigations, close diplomatic interaction, open exchange of know-how and hard police slog will be the key to stopping JI and its maniacal fantasies of regional domination.

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