

Another terrorist atrocity in Bali

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The latest terrorist attack in the tourist areas of the Indonesian island of Bali on Saturday night has killed at least 22 people and injured another 118. The suicide bombings come nearly three years after the October 2002 attacks in Bali's Kuta Beach killed 202 people.

The reactionary nature of the attack is underscored by the indiscriminate slaughter of diners, employees and passers-by in three crowded restaurants. The explosive charges carried by the suicide bombers were packed with ball bearings and pieces of metal to maximise death and injury.

While the attack was clearly targetted at foreign tourists, the majority of casualties were Indonesians. Fourteen Indonesians, one Japanese and four Australians were killed in the three blasts—one in Kuta Square and two at nearby Jimbaran Beach—which occurred within minutes of each other. Among the injured were 64 Indonesians, 20 Australians, seven South Koreans, four Americans, three Japanese, one French and a German.

Indonesian police are yet to identify the suicide bombers or track down others involved. To date, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. But all the indications point to Jemaah Islamiah (JI)—the Islamic extremist group responsible for the 2002 Bali bombing. The recruitment of suicide bombers, the sophisticated nature of the explosive devices and the closely coordinated character of the blasts required money, planning and expertise, like the operation three years ago. JI is also likely to have carried out the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in 2003 and the attack on the Australian embassy last year.

The attack will be seized upon by the Indonesian administration to justify a massive police dragnet and further anti-democratic measures under the guise of "fighting terrorism". Following the 2002 bombings, Jakarta, under pressure from Washington and Canberra, enacted police powers akin to those of the Suharto

dictatorship, including lengthy detention without trial. After Saturday's blasts, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a retired Suharto-era army general, put the country's 200,000 police on top alert.

The bombings also provide Yudhoyono a convenient pretext for blocking protests over his administration's decision to hike up fuel prices last Friday by 87.5 percent for petrol and 105 percent for diesel. The decision has hit the poorest layers of the population who face a 187 percent increase for kerosene commonly used for cooking. Small protests took place in 15 cities across the country over the weekend.

The Bali attack cuts directly across these protests, highlighting the fact that Islamic fundamentalist outfits such as JI are utterly indifferent to the concerns and needs of ordinary working people. JI represents dissident elements of the bourgeoisie, who seek to advance their interests through the demand for an Islamic state in South East Asia. Far from opposing imperialism, it is seeking a new accommodation with the major powers.

Those believed to have planned the latest bombings are two Malaysians—Azahari Husin and Noordin Mohammed Top. Azahari was one of a number of Indonesians and Malaysians, who, in the 1980s and early 1990s, went to Afghanistan as part of the CIA-sponsored holy war against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. Like Al Qaeda, the backbone of JI is composed of Afghan veterans who became disillusioned with their US backers, especially in the wake of the first Gulf War.

The latest bombings will be seized upon by the US and its allies to justify the "war on terrorism"—that is, the subjugation of Iraq and Afghanistan and the imposition of anti-democratic measures at home. The Australian government, in particular, is already exploiting the attack to forge closer ties with the Yudhoyono regime in Jakarta. Canberra has dispatched

28 Australian Federal Police officers to Bali to work with their Indonesian counterparts.

Far from being concerned about the victims, the Howard government and Labor opposition have each used the bombings to push their own agendas. In a bid to justify draconian new anti-terrorism laws he is drawing up, Attorney General Philip Ruddock immediately declared that an attack in Australia was now “highly probable”. The legislation will for the first time allow for extended interrogation without charge and “control orders” or house arrest.



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