

# Jakarta terrorist bombings seized on to justify Afghan war

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The terrorist bombings of the Jakarta JW Marriot and Ritz Carlton hotels last Friday morning in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta were a contemptible and reactionary act. They have served only to provide propaganda grist for the US-led military operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan and will be used to justify further repressive police measures against the multi-million working class and rural poor within Indonesia.

The bombings, the most serious attack since the Bali resort bombings in October 2005, have left at least nine people dead so far and 50 injured—some of whom are in a serious condition.

Among those who lost their lives were two Australian businessmen and an Australian government trade representative, a New Zealand businessman and a waiter at the lounge in the Marriot, as well as two suicide bombers. Of the 50 injured, 17 were foreigners, including people from the United States, Australia, the Netherlands, South Korea, Britain, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Italy and Norway. Jakarta residents and hotel workers made up the majority of the casualties.

Those behind the attack had no compunction about who they murdered or maimed. In a television interview from his hospital bed, hotel worker Yusuf Purnomo said: “My body is intact, but what about the victims who lost their limbs and can’t work anymore?”

It appears that the Marriot bombing was targeted at a group of Indonesian and foreign executives and consultants from recruitment, telecommunications, mining, gas and oil companies who met regularly for breakfast at the hotel. According to the *Australian* on Monday, the suicide bomber passed a larger coffee shop to explode the bombs he was carrying in a backpack and stroller bag near the room exclusively used by the businessmen. When challenged by security the bomber allegedly said he had to “deliver something to my boss.”

The regular weekly breakfasts were chaired by American businessman James Castle, who runs a firm networking international businesses with Indonesian companies. Last Friday, the 19 present were connected to mining interests. A US embassy source said that the Marriot attack appeared to be a “rather surgical

strike to target this meeting room.”

The attack at the Ritz, which occurred immediately after the 7:45 a.m. blast at the Marriot, seems to have been less specific, aimed simply at the largest restaurant serving breakfast.

The use of suicide bombers, the types of explosive devices used and the apparent targets led to immediate suggestions that the atrocities were carried out by individuals who shared the xenophobic and extreme Islamist views espoused by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which was founded in 1993 by clerics Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Bashir. JI supporters or contacts of Bashir were involved in the 2002 Bali resort attacks that killed over 200 tourists and staff.

Police Major General Nanan Sukarna has claimed that the devices used on Friday were “identical” to those used in the attacks in Bali. Police found one unexploded device in a hotel room at the Marriot. Police are said to be hunting for Malaysian-born Noordin Mohammad Top who was accused of being one of the masterminds of the Bali attacks in 2002 and 2005 and allegedly leads a JI splinter group. Police say that are investigating whether explosives found a week before the bombings, buried in the garden of Top’s father-in-law in Central Java, were connected to the hotel attacks.

Before the police and forensic investigation had hardly begun, however, the political establishment in Jakarta, Washington and Canberra were putting their own cynical and self-serving interpretations on the significance of the Jakarta bombings.

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd used the attacks and the death and injury of Australians to create an amalgam between the bombings and the war in Afghanistan, where the eleventh Australian soldier was killed over the weekend. Speaking outside his Canberra church on Sunday, Rudd said: “It’s important for us all to remember here in Australia that Afghanistan has been a training ground for terrorists worldwide.”

The opposition leader, Malcolm Turnbull, echoed the same theme, saying: “What signal would be sent to terrorism in Indonesia if we were to abandon the battle against terrorism in Afghanistan?”

The Obama administration reacted in a similar fashion. After downplaying the original pretext of Al Qaeda for months, the Jakarta atrocities have been seized on in Washington to once again justify the escalating war in Afghanistan with references to the war on terrorism. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton pontificated that they “remind us that the threat of terrorism remains very real”.

Such propaganda is sheer deception. To the extent that South East Asian Islamist extremists “trained” in Afghanistan, they did so in the 1980s as part of the US-financed and armed mujahaddin war against the Soviet occupation of the country. Three of the men who carried out the 2002 Bali bombings—Ali Gufron, Ali Imron and Imam Samudra—were among them.

At the time, American and Australian governments hailed the so-called holy warriors they helped to create as “freedom fighters”—in the full knowledge that their aim was the establishment of an Islamic theocratic state. When such individuals recruited from various parts of the world returned to their native countries, many entered into organisations representing the wing of the local elite that advocated the same reactionary objective.

The veterans of the anti-Soviet jihad quickly came into conflict with US-backed regimes and grew hostile to their former great power sponsors. The aim of terrorist atrocities, from the September 11 attacks to the Bali bombings, has been to pressure the US and its allies into withdrawing their backing for states such as the monarchy in Saudi Arabia and the Indonesian regime.

The US used the 9/11 attack as the pretext for the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in order to establish its strategic dominance over the resource-rich regions of Central Asia and Middle East. The result has been the deaths or displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

The real relationship between the US wars and proxy wars since 2001 with Islamic extremism in South East Asia is that the brutal repression of largely Muslim populations in Afghanistan, Iraq and north-west Pakistan is portrayed by tendencies such as JI not as imperialist neo-colonialism, but as an attack on Islam. Within Indonesia, the Islamists indict the collaboration between Yudhoyono and his predecessors with US and Australian imperialism and connect it with the moves to allow transnational energy companies greater control of Indonesian natural resources under conditions in which the majority of the population endure poverty and deprivation.

The failure of the movement against the Suharto dictatorship in 1998 to bring about any genuine social and political change, and the exposure that *reformasi* leaders like Megawati Sukarnoputri as another wing of a nepotistic and military-dominated ruling elite, is also exploited by the Islamists. Deepening social discontent and political alienation has continued to create an audience for their disorientated hatred for non-Muslims and westerners and reactionary calls for an Islamic state throughout the region.

While the imperialist powers use the latest bombing to justify neo-colonialism, it has been seized upon by Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono—known as “SBY”—to tighten his grip over the state apparatus. Despite his overwhelming victory in the elections earlier this month, his government is acutely conscious that its agenda of even greater free market deregulation will aggravate the differences in the ruling elite over economic policy. Worsening living standards of the population will trigger social unrest.

On Sunday, Yudhoyono made the extraordinary claim that the bombings were part of an attempt by unnamed “elites” to prevent him being installed for a second term once his victory is confirmed on July 27. He declared: “There’s a statement that there will be a revolution if SBY won, there’s a statement we will turn Indonesia like Iran, and last, there’s a statement that SBY will not be and cannot be inaugurated.”

In what has been interpreted as a direct reference to one of his election rivals, Prabowo Subianto, Yudhoyono also stated: “Law enforcement has to capture and try the mastermind behind this violence. Perhaps in the past we have people who committed murder, made people disappear and they managed to evade the law. This time our country cannot let this one go.” Like Yudhoyono, Prabowo is a former Suharto-era general, who headed one of the notorious Kopassus special forces and was the son-in-law of the former dictator.

Yudhoyono’s insinuations against Prabowo set the stage for any protests against the election result or anti-government activity to be crudely linked with a terrorist conspiracy. The Jakarta attacks will also be used to retain or even strengthen the repressive police powers that were introduced by then President Megawati and her security minister Yudhoyono following the 2002 Bali attacks.

The political bankruptcy of terrorist organisations such as JI is confirmed with every atrocity that is committed. The bombings in Jakarta have contributed nothing to the struggle against oppression or inequality. Instead, they have played directly into the hands of the great powers and Yudhoyono, to the detriment of the interests of the working class in Indonesia and the masses of Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan.



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