“Paris-style” terror attacks in Jakarta

Thomas Gaist
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At least five men attacked targets near downtown Jakarta’s Sarinah Mall on Thursday, setting off explosives near a Starbucks cafe and a Burger King restaurant, and firing handguns and rifles at police and bystanders amid some of the Indonesian capital’s elite hotels and business offices.

Despite media comparisons to the attacks in Paris last November, only seven people died in the attacks, five of them the gunmen themselves, and only two among their targets. The circumstances of the attack and the reasons for its apparent failure remain murky.

The attackers reportedly also threw grenades at a police checkpoint. Later Thursday, a series of explosions struck additional targets in Jakarta, including the Turkish and Pakistani embassies. The Indonesian military began moving units into the city center almost immediately in response to the incident.

According to spokesmen for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and reports in Western media, the attack was planned and coordinated from Islamic State’s self-proclaimed capital at Raqqa, Syria, under the leadership of an Indonesian national and former Internet cafe owner, Bahrun Naim, who traveled to Syria to join the Islamist forces last year.

Naim allegedly directed a team of ISIS fighters that included foreign militants, including at least two ethnic Uighurs from China’s western province of Xinjiang.

Thursday saw an outpouring of warnings by Western media and governments, claiming that the attacks represent a qualitative escalation of terrorist activities in Southeast Asia. ISIS is seeking to make Indonesia the “Asian beachhead” for a new caliphate, Reuters editorialized in the middle of its report Thursday. Australian Attorney-General George Brandis similarly told media during a recent visit to Jakarta that ISIS is determined to secure an Indonesian “distant caliphate.”

Australia’s foreign minister Julie Bishop proclaimed that Canberra would extend “any support that Indonesia may need to respond to these attacks.”

In its In-Depth report Thursday night, titled “Terror returns to region as Islamists hit Jakarta,” *The Australian* proclaimed that the assault has “raised fears of a revived Islamic terrorism campaign in the world’s most populous Muslim nation, sponsored by Middle East-based terror outfit Islamic State.” Australian leaders responded immediately to the incident with offers of enhanced counterterrorism assistance.

The attacks are the latest in a series of high-profile terror attacks attributed to the ISIS network and its affiliates, including attacks in California, France, and Pakistan, each of which has been immediately seized upon to justify a further intensification of the interconnected agenda of war, police repression and dictatorship being pursued by every bourgeois ruling class worldwide.

In the name of preventing further “Paris-style” attacks, all of the major powers are moving to normalize the continuous occupation of their major urban centers by military and militarized-police detachments.

Singapore has announced stepped up security operations in response to the attacks, including joint intelligence operations coordinated with Jakarta, according to the *Strai ts Times* .

“Two months since Paris, and two days after Istanbul, now there is an attack in Jakarta. This menace is just going to grow,” said Singapore’s interior minister K. Shanmugam.

Indonesian police spokesman General Anton Charily also said the attacks were modeled on those in Paris, and claimed that ISIS-affiliated forces are surging in Indonesia and neighboring countries. Jakarta mobilized more than 100,000 security forces last month in response to an alleged “credible threat” of a terror attack that never materialized.

German security forces are preparing for “multiple,

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time-staggered" attacks against soft targets, modeled on the Paris attacks, according to a secret German government report leaked Thursday.

The US government, which did so much to arm, train and mobilize the extremist groups out of which ISIS emerged, has also signaled its determination to deepen its military and covert operations in Indonesia in the wake of the attacks. An official statement from the US National Security Council declared Thursday: "The United States is strongly committed to our strategic partnership with Indonesia and will stand by the Government of Indonesia as it works to bring those responsible for this barbaric terrorist attack to justice…"

US Secretary of State John Kerry also condemned the attack, telling media that the US and Indonesia "stand united in our efforts to eliminate those who choose terror."

In a telling irony, Kerry delivered his remarks during a joint appearance with Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, whose government has played a central role in US efforts to mobilize jihadist forces on behalf of its wars for regime change in Libya and Syria.

Despite the media presentation of the Jakarta killings as representing a sudden outbreak of terrorism in the region, groups with links to US and Saudi-backed terror networks have carried out attacks across Southeast Asia for more than a decade, providing a useful cat's paw on behalf of Washington's drive to dominate the Asia-Pacific.

The Islamist militia Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which calls for a pan-Asian Islamic State and is linked into the broader Al Qaeda financial network, itself a splitoff from covert networks run by US, Saudi and Pakistani intelligence, has repeatedly carried out attacks, including the 2002 Bali bombings and 2009 Jakarta terror attacks against a number of luxury hotels.

Like those attacks, the latest atrocity in Jakarta will be seized on to promote the US agenda of militarism and security crackdowns throughout the region.

From the official beginning of the Bush administration's "Global War on Terror," Southeast Asia was considered a crucial war front by the American political and military elites.

A 2001 RAND Corporation study, "The Role of Southeast Asia in US Strategy Toward China," called for the US to increase its "military engagements with Southeast Asian states" and develop a "more robust and diversified network of access arrangements," along with "strengthened military ties with the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam."

The expanding US regional power network should focus on "both deterring and preparing for a possible Chinese challenge," RAND wrote.

With ever greater recklessness, the US ruling class is seeking to project power onto crucial pressure points around Eurasia.

Washington is increasingly compelled to revive the "hub and spoke" system of alliances between Washington and the regional powers that, after World War II, served as "the primary vehicle for the US and allied governments to prosecute counterinsurgency campaigns against communist guerrilla forces," *Asia Matters for America* noted in its 2014 study, "An Emergent US Security Strategy in Southeast Asia."

Southeast Asia is already witnessing "the emergence of an incipient coalition in support of US security strategy," *Asia Matters* wrote.

Rather than the supposedly novel threat of terrorism in the region, the real lesson of Thursday's bloodletting is that Indonesia, which straddles the main transit route between the Indian and Pacific Oceans at the Straights of Malacca, will be a central target of this agenda.

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