

IS THIS THE END OF JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH?

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I. INTRODUCTION

On 30 June 2024, sixteen senior leaders of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) gathered in Bogor and issued a statement dissolving the organisation. They affirmed their commitment to the Indonesian republic, their intention to abide by Indonesian law and their decision to ensure that the curriculum and teaching materials in JI-affiliated boarding schools (*pesantren*) were in line with orthodox Islam.

The decision to disband JI was likely the result of several factors:

- The influence of the intellectuals within JI who have long been more interested in dakwah and education than jihadi actions.
- A cost-benefit analysis that suggested the only way to protect JI's biggest assets – its schools – was to abandon its status as a covert organisation (*tanzim sirri*) and work openly as an above-ground network. Para Wijayanto was already moving in this direction at the time of his arrest in 2019.
- Intensive engagement of Densus 88 with the intellectuals, especially Abu Rusdan, Arif Siswanto alias Abu Mahmuda, and Bambang Sukirno.

The timing possibly could have been affected by the need for Detachment 88 to have some good publicity after all the negative reporting about its sordid feud with the Attorney General's office, but the decision was long in the works.

It is too early to say what the consequences are, but the men who signed the statement have enough respect and credibility within the organisation to ensure widespread acceptance. Not everyone will be happy, however, and it is not impossible that splinters will emerge. JI supporters in Poso, Banten/West Java and Lampung will be important to watch.

The decision will almost certainly mean dropping the name "Jemaah Islamiyah" and creating a new education-focused entity. It will likely mean the end of efforts to acquire foreign military training, at least for the near future. It will be harder to drop the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Indonesia (note that the statement made no mention of democracy), although the struggle will now be through peaceful means.

II. THE STATEMENT

The June 30 statement, captured on video and read aloud by Abu Rusdan, is as follows:¹

“Herewith the results of a meeting of senior JI figures and heads of JI-affiliated pesantren. We state that we

1. Dissolve the organisation al-Jamaah al-Islamiyah and return to the Republic of Indonesia;
2. Guarantee that the curriculum and teaching materials will be free from the attitude of extremism and reflect that of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah;
3. Establish a team to study the curriculum and teaching materials;
4. Are ready to become actively involved in independence to make Indonesia a nation of progress and dignity;
5. Are ready to abide by the law that applies in the unitary republic of Indonesia and are committed to and will be consistent in implementing the logical consequences thereof.
6. Matters connected to the points above will be followed up in discussions with Detachment 88 of police headquarters (Mabes Polri).”

Bogor, 30 June 2024

Signed by

1. Abu Rusdan
[real name Thoriqudin, born 1960, in Kudus, Central Java. On the JI central committee. Father was Darul Islam leader. University degree in mass communications. Trained on the Pakistan-Afghan border. Became acting amir briefly after Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s arrest in 2003. Arrested first in 2003 for harboring Bali bombing fugitive, sentenced to three and a half years in prison, released a year early. Arrested again in 2022, sentenced to six years.]
2. Para Wijayanto
[Born 1964 in Subang, West Java. University degree in engineering; trained briefly in Philippines, 2000; amir of JI, 2010-2019. Arrested 2019, sentenced to seven years in prison.]
3. Arif Siswanto alias Abu Mahmuda
[born 1955 in Sukoharjo, Central Java. Religious teacher. Tapped to be next JI amir at time of arrest in 2020. Served a three-year sentence, now released.]
4. Bambang Sukirno
[never convicted. Born 1975, Central Java, JI publisher, led several missions of the Hilal Ahmar Society of Indonesia to Syria.]
5. Abu Fatih [real name: Abdullah Ansori; former head of Mantiqi II, JI’s administrative division based in Indonesia, 1993-2001; older brother of Abu Husna, member of JI’s founding generation]

¹ The video is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC-dhx5vf7U&t=40s>.

6. Ust. Zarkasih
[real name: Zuhroni, born 1962, Pekalongan, Central Java; university graduate, civil engineering; trained in Afghanistan and Philippines; succeeded Abu Fatih as head of Mantiqi II; amir of JI from 2004-2007; arrested 2007, received 15-year sentence, released 2015.]
7. Ust. Sholahuddin
[born Kudus, 5 June 1963, former head of wakalah Jakarta]
8. Bahrudin Soleh
9. Sartono Gunadi
[never arrested, former director of Pesantren Al Muttaqin, Jepara, Central Java]
10. Ust. Abu Dujana
[real name, Ainul Bahri, born 1969, West Java, trained in Afghanistan, instructor in Mindanao, former head of JI military affairs, arrested with Zarkasih in 2007, also sentenced to 15 years and released in 2015.]
11. Fadri Fathurrahman
12. Teungku Azhar
[never arrested, secretary-general of Dewan Syariat Kota Surakarta]
13. Ust. Imtihan
[teacher at Mahad Aly An-Nur, JI's main tertiary institute, and also a member of the fatwa team of JI's central committee]
14. Ust. Hamad
15. Ust. Mustaqim
[never arrested, head of JI's dakwah section and also director of Pesantren Darus-Syahadah]
16. Ust. Fahim
[real name: (Usman bin Sef, born Surabaya 27 Juni 1965, former head of JI's Pesantren Coordination Forum (Forum Kordinasi Pondok Pesantren, FKPP and former head of the East Java wakalah].

III. THE BACKGROUND

In a sense, JI's intellectual base has been moving toward this position – ending violence, ending its covert status, focusing on dakwah and education – for years. In 2009, JI created the Majelis Dakwah Umat Islam after a major clash in Poso in 2007 and the arrest of its top leadership. Abu Rusdan argued at the time that JI could not hope to survive without the support of the community, and there was clearly no support for violence.

In 2009-2010, these same intellectuals, now with Para Wijayanto in charge as amir, kept JI out of the Aceh training project that virtually all other salafi jihadi organisations joined. At the time, a young JI intellectual argued strongly against acts of jihad in Indonesia on the grounds that they only served to further erode local support. He noted at the time that if establishing an Islamic state were the goal, then above-ground organisations like FPI had made far more

progress than JI had.² The only members of JI who joined the Aceh camp were associated with the splinter group that had been led by the late Noordin Top.

Some JI members broke away to support the more violent agenda of ISIS in 2014, notably Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abu Husna, his cellmate, though Abu Husna's followers in the organisation now known as JAK (Jamaah Anshorul Khilafah) never engaged in violence.

Para himself moved JI toward a more moderate stance, disassociating JI from the use of violence in Indonesia but maintaining its commitment to an Islamic state and the need to maintain a military capacity to be prepared to fight when the formation of the state was at hand. This justified the search for militias to train with in Syria and Yemen. Para also supported a shift to a more political strategy, forming a political party or joining a coalition with above-ground Islamists, for example in campaigning against Ahok, the Christian governor of Jakarta, in 2016-17.

All this means that the shift to a more open organisation is the culmination of a long process that the intellectuals have led, although it took the government crackdown from 2019 to 2023 and the arrests of hundreds of JI members to force these leaders to confront a stark reality: elimination or cooperation.

IV. RELATIONS WITH DETACHMENT 88

Since the 2007 arrest of then-amir Zarkasih and Abu Dujana, relations between JI leaders and Detachment 88 had been reasonably friendly. Both were model prisoners and helped the police in counselling other inmates. After the emergence of ISIS in 2013, Lutfi Haidaroh alias Ubaid, a JI member who was arrested in 2010 for the second time for his involvement in the Aceh training camp, was instrumental in helping formulate and disseminate anti-ISIS arguments from Cipinang Prison in Jakarta at his own expense.

After police discovered in late 2017 that JI had been sending cadres to Syria for military training, it began to investigate the organisation more intensively. The arrest and subsequent investigation of Para Wijayanto in late 2019 revealed that the membership had grown to 6,000 under Para's leadership. This presented a dilemma for top officers of Detachment 88. It was not possible to arrest every JI member without placing an extraordinary burden on investigators, prosecutors, judges and prison officials, who were already stretched to the limit after the 2018 anti-terror law allowed for "preventive strikes". The alternative was a decision around 2021-22 to pursue "reconciliation" with selected JI leaders. If they agreed to revoke their *bai'at* (pledge of obedience to the JI amir), they would not be arrested.

JI leaders also faced a dilemma. If they continued as before, not only would more and more members be arrested, but in all likelihood, their schools and other assets would be seized. They therefore agreed to engage in an intensive dialogue with police, beginning around 2022.

² "Refleksi Jihad Aceh 2010", 8 April 2010; "Refleksi Jihad Aceh 2010 (Bagian II)", 9 April 2010, and "Refleksi Jihad Aceh 2010 (Bagian III)", 21 April 2010, www.arringmah.id.

These discussions took place both in prisons, where Abu Rusdan, Arif Siswanto and Para Wijayanto were detained, and outside, with leaders like Bambang Sukirno and Abu Fatih, who were never arrested. In the end, these senior figures agreed to disband their organisation.

V. REACTIONS AND POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES

As of 3 July, news of the JI statement had not been formally released by the police, but it was circulating on the Internet, sometimes with commentary. The website www.annahmah.id headlined a story on the statement, “From rejection to lovers of Garuda Pancasila”. Irfan Awwas, a founder of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), taunted the JI leaders for being “pragmatists”, as if it were a derogatory term, suggesting they must have done it for compensation.³ Certainly the scorn from that quarter is likely to grow. Awwas also suggested that the about-face by JI is a betrayal of the fighters who died in its name, and some in JI may also see it as such.

There has been some speculation about whether the June 30 statement is an example of *taqqiya*, the practice of lying for a pious goal in a situation of emergency or persecution. Abu Bakar Ba’asyir has been a prominent proponent and practitioner of *taqqiya*, for example, but the men who signed the statement are different and are likely to be genuinely committed to the new focus.

The emergence of a splinter group is possible, but probably not immediately. JI has a history of splinters: MMI itself could be considered one in 2000 and a leadership struggle within MMI led in turn to the splinter called Jamaah Anshorul Tauhid (JAT). Noordin Top’s group started out as a more activist group within JI but emerged as a splinter in 2004. And a tiny splinter, angry over the JI arrests, emerged in 2019 but all members were quickly arrested. This is the first time, however, that such a large group of senior leaders has come forward publicly to announce a strategic shift. If there is opposition, it may take some time for it to crystallise and find the leaders who can make an alternative organisation viable.

For the moment, then, the likely result is the flourishing of JI-affiliated schools and the increasing involvement in public life of the men who signed the 30 June statement. What happens to the rest of the membership remains to be seen.

³ Irfan Awwas, “Pasca Bubar dan Minta Maaf, JI Dapat Apa?”, annahmah.id, 2 July 2024.

INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT (IPAC)

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