

# Strategic Analysis Paper

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## Indonesia: Fight against Terror has Consequences and Failings

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### Key Points

- Slow judicial processes are impeding the efforts of the Indonesian Government to ban radical Islamist groups that present a terrorist threat.
- The government appears to have become more reactive in its approach to counterterrorism.
- The latest move to introduce a new addition to the counter-terrorism squad serves little purpose. A better approach would be to strengthen existing mechanisms.
- The imprisonment of convicted terrorists is not achieving the desired outcome of closing down terrorist networks.
- It may now be time to rethink the approaches taken to de-radicalisation and the countering of radical ideals.

### Summary

In May 2018, three high-profile terrorist attacks took place in Indonesia, including one led by a mother and her children in Surabaya. This drew a quick response from the Indonesian Government as, later that month, Parliament finally pushed through a revision of the country's anti-terrorism legislation, which had been in the works for a number of years. Continuing its fight against radical groups, the government banned militant group Jemaah Ansharut Dualah in late-July. While the government is taking a number of steps to address the issue of terrorism, there remain significant challenges in the fight against radicalism.

## Analysis

### ***Slow Judicial Processes***

The ban on Jemaah Ansharut Dualah (JAD) sheds some light on the slow judicial processes in Indonesia. JAD, which has been linked to the May 2018 Surabaya bombings, was only banned by a court order on 31 July. That is of concern because the group has been linked to attacks made over two years ago in January 2016 and has been listed as a terrorist organisation by the United States Department of State since January 2017. According to the [Australian Government](#), which also lists JAD as a terrorist organisation, the primary objective of the group is to establish an Islamic State under Sharia law in Indonesia. The group is also an umbrella organisation for smaller extremist groups supporting Daesh (also known as the Islamic State). JAD pledged its allegiance to Daesh in 2015. The time taken to ban JAD has drawn criticism from some [commentators](#), noting that until only recently, JAD members have been free to convene and plan without breaking the law, although some individuals linked to the group had been [arrested](#) in the past.

It is difficult to understand why it took the authorities so long to declare the group illegal. Some media outlets have pointed to recent anti-terrorism laws passed in May 2018, saying that the ban was only possible due to those new laws. That, however, seems unlikely given that those laws were focused more on making it easier to detain suspects and increasing the role of the military in counter-terrorism ([for better or worse](#)). The Indonesian Government also successfully banned Hizbut ut-Tahrir in July 2017, an organisation that was not overtly linked to terrorist activities.

Unfortunately, it seems to have more to do with Indonesia's slow and inefficient judicial system. It took [six years](#) for the Indonesian authorities to outlaw Jemaah Islamiyah, a terrorist group behind the 2002 Bali bombings. One factor that may have hampered the banning of JAD could be the fact that, unlike Hizbut ut-Tahrir, the group was [allegedly](#) not legally registered in the government database. While that may have confused the process, it should not have prevented the ban for so long.

### ***Government Approach Becoming more Reactive***

It now seems that the Indonesian Government has become more reactive in its approach to the terrorist threat. In January 2016, explosions and gunfire were reported near a shopping mall in Central Jakarta, wounding 23 people and killing eight. As noted in a previous [Strategic Weekly Analysis](#), the response of President Jokowi to that attack was calm and subdued. Rather than declaring war on those who had committed the atrocities and rushing through the anti-terror law that was in the works, Jokowi focused on playing down concerns while encouraging Indonesians to remain calm and worry-free. As the government took a step back, the anti-terror squad, commonly referred to as Densus 88, set to work and thwarted two terrorist attacks later that year.

In 2017, frustration began to build for Jokowi. On 24 May of that year, two suicide bombers attacked a bus terminal in East Jakarta, injuring 11 and killing three police officers. After visiting the site, Jokowi [became more resolute](#), telling reporters that the government

needed to accelerate plans to strengthen its anti-terrorism laws and that he had ordered the chief security minister to work quickly, adding that 'If we make a comparison with other countries, they already have regulations to allow authorities to prevent (attacks) before they happen.' Densus 88 continued to make [arrests](#) throughout that year.

More recently, in May 2018, Jokowi took a step further to ease the minds of Indonesians after a spate of attacks in Surabaya and Pekanbaru. Speaking to the media on 18 May, Jokowi announced that he would revive an anti-terror command unit from the Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, or TNI), known as the Joint Special Operations Command, or *Koopsusgab*. The unit would be used to assist the Indonesian National Police (Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia, or POLRI), in situations where the capacity of the police to respond may be insufficient. The effect that it will have on current counter-terrorism operations, however, is questionable.

### ***A Token Approach***

Densus 88, which has been [widely praised](#) for its successes, falls under the umbrella of POLRI. Trained and funded by both the United States and Australia, Densus 88 is staffed by over 1,300 employees trained in a range of fields including surveillance, intelligence gathering and analysis, and communication interceptions. The squad also includes explosive experts, trained snipers and breach-squad teams. Since its inception in 2003, the group has made over 1,200 arrests and, since 2010, has disrupted more than eighty terrorist plots.

*Koopsusgab*, on the other hand, was a short-lived initiative. Inaugurated on 9 June 2015 under former TNI commander Moeldoko, *Koopsusgab* was formed as a counterterrorism unit led by the TNI. It was later suspended under Moeldoko's successor Gatot Nurmantyo, partly due to laws that prohibit the TNI from conducting counterterrorist operations unless specifically requested to do so by police.

While those laws have now been reviewed to allow TNI involvement, there is no guarantee that it will lead to the police and military co-operating more effectively. In fact, it may lead to friction and infighting which could actually impair counter-terrorism efforts. As noted in a previous FDI [Strategic Analysis Paper](#), the leadership of the TNI has usually been driven by an ambition to reclaim its role in domestic affairs. In the past, the TNI enjoyed strong levels of influence, which decreased as Indonesia progressed into the democratic era. In an effort to remain relevant, despite a lack of major external threats, the TNI has sought to expand its role into internal security matters, which are typically handled by POLRI. That has led to some tension between the two organisations, with POLRI wary of TNI interference and the TNI not wanting to see police capabilities improved to the point where the threshold at which military support would be required is raised.

The latest decision to revive *Koopsusgab* and allow TNI involvement in counterterrorism operations, therefore, seems to be largely a token measure. It follows an apparent trend of the government is becoming more reactive in its fight against terrorism. As is the nature of intelligence, it is inevitable that some individuals or groups will slip under the radar of counterterrorist surveillance. Instead of reactive measures, the Indonesian Government

should adopt a more proactive focus by bolstering existing mechanisms to avoid repeating past mistakes.

### ***Ineffective Prisons***

A recently released [report](#) from the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) highlights some of the key long-term consequences that the Indonesian Government may encounter due to the nature of its fight against terrorism. As seen above, the primary focus of the government appears to be intercepting terrorist threats before they happen and incarcerating those behind the planned attacks. While that is absolutely a necessary step in fighting terrorism, the high incarceration rate may prove to be problematic given Indonesia's overburdened and deteriorating prison infrastructure. The problem is likely to worsen in the short-term as the recently passed anti-terrorism laws make it easier to detain suspects on broader grounds. A [new prison facility](#) in the works, which will house up to 500 maximum security inmates, will hopefully ease some of the pressure.

A second issue highlighted by IPAC is the failure of the prison system to break down terrorist linkages and networks. Given that most terrorist plots in Indonesia involve a group rather than "lone wolf" combatants, prisoners on terror-related charges tend to be incarcerated and released as small groups. This makes it easier for those groups to maintain their linkages and networks, potentially inhibiting their return to normal life after release. Additionally, with large numbers of inmates being detained under terrorism-related charges in sometimes high-density facilities, there is a risk that some individuals may actually be further radicalised while under rehabilitation.

In addition to imprisoning suspects, the Indonesian Government has put a focus on de-radicalising convicted terrorists to prevent them from re-offending. De-radicalisation is often touted as an effective strategy, although measurements of its success are limited. According to [Sidney Jones](#), counter-terrorism expert and director of IPAC, de-radicalisation programmes in Indonesia are generally not built on a solid basis of research and understanding of the issue. Speaking to Future Directions International, Ms Jones added that: 'Officials sometimes take ideas off the top of their heads and think that they will be an effective antidote to radicalisation. For example, many of those with a military background believe that the root cause of radicalisation is insufficient nationalism'.

### ***Counterterrorism Strategies***

While there is no tried-and-true de-radicalisation method, a blanket approach to the issue will not be effective. Prisoners are more likely to engage if they believe that their specific issues are being [addressed](#). An effective approach would see interventions tailored for each individual prisoner. Such an approach would be resource-intensive and is unlikely to come to fruition any time soon. Assistance from NGOs, however, could help to lessen the load for the Indonesian Government.

When de-radicalisation fails, the Indonesian authorities need to deploy greater and more effective post-release monitoring capabilities. With prisons already struggling to monitor high-risk detainees due to a lack of infrastructure, it is difficult to see how convicts can be

monitored effectively in the post-release environment. While ultimately effective, 24-hour monitoring can also quickly become cost-prohibitive. Adding to those concerns is the question of how long to monitor individual suspects. As noted in the [IPAC report](#), Indonesian police were closely monitoring several of the men involved in the May 2018 Surabaya bombings but pulled the surveillance three months before the attacks as their suspicions were eased.

A greater emphasis should also be placed on preventing terrorist attacks before they even get to the detailed planning stage. The majority of de-radicalisation programmes are targeted at detainees and aimed at preventing re-offending. That does little to establish a robust preventive measure, as the majority of terrorist attacks are not committed by convicted terrorists. To stop terrorist activities at the earliest stage possible, preventive measures need to be put in place to stop individuals from becoming radicalised in first place, although that may be exceptionally difficult. As a start, closer attention needs to be paid to the radical preachers in some mosques and *pesantran* schools who promote extremist ideologies. Rather than attempting to silence radical voices (which runs the risk of empowering them), efforts should be directed towards running effective counterpropaganda campaigns. Such efforts should be targeted at families and communities, not just the men and, especially, not just at previous offenders. Empowering local clerics to counter the voices of influential radical preachers could be an effective strategy. That being said, such campaigns can only go so far and will do little to sway those who surround themselves with radical ideals, protected by a tightknit community of radicals and a cluster of WhatsApp echo chambers.

### **Conclusion**

There is a long way to go in the fight against terrorism in Indonesia. While Densus 88 has proven successful in its ability to intercept attacks that are already in the planning stages, there is comparatively little focus placed on addressing the earlier stages of a terrorist attack. Unfortunately, those stages of radicalisation and networking are the most difficult to address and in which to measure success.

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