

Indonesia: Radicalisation of the “Palembang Group”

I. OVERVIEW

Indonesia has earned well-deserved praise for its handling of home-grown extremism, but the problem has not gone away. In April 2009, ten men involved in a jihadi group in Palembang, South Sumatra, were sent to prison on terrorism charges for killing a Christian teacher and planning more ambitious attacks. Their history provides an unusually detailed case study of radicalisation – the process by which law-abiding individuals become willing to use violence to achieve their goals. The sobering revelation from Palembang is how easy that transformation can be if the right ingredients are present: a core group of individuals, a charismatic leader, motivation and opportunity. Another ingredient, access to weapons, is important but not essential: the Palembang group carried out its first attack with a hammer and only later moved to making bombs.

The group was uncovered by accident. Singaporean authorities and Interpol had mounted an international manhunt for a fugitive Singaporean member of the regional jihadi organisation Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Mohammad Hassan bin Saynudin alias Fajar Taslim. Indonesian counter-terrorism police were separately pursuing the network of the elusive Malaysian terrorist Noordin Mohammed Top. Both searches led to Palembang in 2006 and the targets turned out to be linked. The Singaporean had helped turn a local non-violent religious study circle into a militant jihadi group that then made contact with the Noordin network. By 2007, the men were under surveillance; by mid-2008 they were under arrest.

The most important element in the group’s radicalisation was charismatic leadership, which two men provided. One was the Singaporean, Fajar Taslim, a large, good-humoured, bushy-bearded man of unlimited self-confidence. He had trained in Afghanistan, reportedly met Osama bin Laden or succeeded in convincing others that he had, and by his own admission, acted as a provocateur, constantly goading his colleagues to prove themselves. At the time he arrived in Palembang, he was being sought by Interpol in connection with a 2001 plot to blow Singapore’s airport.

The second, Sulthon Qolbi alias Ustad Asadollah, had fought in Maluku, an area of intense sectarian fighting in the years immediately following the downfall of President Soeharto, from 1999 to 2005. Engaging, persuasive and very hardline, he was on Indonesia’s most-wanted list for his involvement in an attack in May 2005 in West Ceram, Maluku, in which five paramilitary police were killed.

Both men separately came upon a small study circle whose biggest concern was the conversion of Muslims by Christian evangelicals. Three of the men involved were members of the South Sumatra branch of an Islamic anti-apostasy organisation, Forum Against Conversion Movement (Forum Anti Gerakan Pemurtadan, FAKTA), and FAKTA materials helped set the group’s agenda, but neither these three nor any of the others in the group had ever actively endorsed violence. Fajar and Sulthon provided the ideology and political drive to turn them into an Islamic group (*jama’ah*) with a commander (*amir*) and a commitment to jihad in the form of military operations (*amaliyah*) against Islam’s enemies. The first big leap was getting the members to consider violence against the Christian proselytisers they thus far had only preached against. Once they were willing to kill, a broader range of targets became thinkable, including Western civilians.

Access to weapons kept the group going when otherwise motivation might have waned. Without firearms or explosives, carrying out a radical agenda has natural limits. Getting a gun, even just one, gave the Palembang group a huge incentive to use it. By contrast, funding was not a particularly important factor in radicalisation, nor was access to the internet. With the exception of the gun and a large donation of potassium chlorate for bomb-making, the group scraped together what it needed locally, and it was not much. The biggest expenses were round-trip bus tickets and a house rental at about \$20 a month. All communication took place by mobile phone or through face-to-face meetings; there appears to have been almost no use of computers.

The Palembang group was not particularly competent nor ideologically driven; most of the men used as operatives needed repeated infusions of jihadi pep talks.

Four of its five attempts at operations failed, and none of the many bombs it made was ever used. But its lack of success should not obscure some important warning signs that the investigation revealed.

First, fear of "Christianisation" in Indonesia can be a powerful local driver for radicalisation, perhaps not as strong as communal conflict that takes Muslim lives, as in Ambon and Poso, but potent nonetheless. When the Palembang group's links to FAKTA were first reported, FAKTA's national leaders indignantly rejected any link to terrorism, and they were right: theirs is a non-violent, if hardline, civil society advocacy organisation. But for some conservative Muslims, apostasy is a worse sin than murder, and the outrage engendered by Christian conversion efforts can be exploited by those with a jihadi agenda.

Second, a loose association of current or former JI members, including Noordin Top, the Malaysian responsible for the major bombings in Indonesia between 2003 and 2005, apparently continues to look for and train proxies to undertake attacks on the U.S. and its allies. In this case, an Afghan veteran and JI member, Saifuddin Zuhri alias Sabit alias Sugeng, became the liaison to the Palembang group, saying that he was in direct communication with Noordin. It was immaterial that the group's members, with one major exception, were not JI and had no past affiliation with jihadi groups. Sabit provided a gun, ammunition, explosive materials, a bomb-making instructor and suggestions on possible targets. His gamble on the Palembang group did not pay off, but bets in the future on other possible proxies could – and Sabit is still at large, as are several other fugitives with the potential to lead and recruit.

Third, attention to JI-affiliated schools remains critical. The problem is not what they teach; it is that they serve as places of refuge and communication hubs, and the *bai'at*, or oath of loyalty sworn by JI members makes it unthinkable to turn anyone away. In this case, a JI boarding school (*pesantren*) became critical to the Palembang group's radicalisation, simply by being a place where extremists periodically showed up.

Finally, assistance to the police should continue. The Palembang group was uncovered by accident, and there were various points along the way where better investigative skills could have detected its existence much earlier – long before the Christian teacher was murdered or any bombs prepared. Even with the enormous strides made by the counter-terrorism unit of the police, it is still possible for serious extremist activity to take place in Indonesia without anyone knowing.

II. ANI SUGANDI AND THE BEGINNING OF THE NETWORK

The emergence of the Palembang group is the story of how several different networks came to intersect.¹ One emerged around Ani Sugandi, founder of the JI-affiliated *pesantren* al-Furqon in Ogan Komering Ilir (OKI), a Javanese transmigrant area of South Sumatra some five hours outside Palembang. This network extended back to Central Java, to Yogyakarta, where Sugandi first joined JI; Kudus and Solo, where his JI superiors lived; and Purbalingga, where his wife is from. Sugandi never joined the Palembang group or endorsed its plans, but he nevertheless played a pivotal, if inadvertent, role in its development.

Sugandi has impeccable JI credentials, with direct personal ties to Abdur Rohim bin Thoyib alias Abu Husna, the JI leader arrested in Malaysia in January 2008.² It was on Abu Husna's recommendation that he went to the Afghan-Pakistan border for training from 1987 to 1992, in the same batch as some of the men who were to become JI's top commanders.³ On his return to

¹For more on terrorist networks in Indonesia, see among other Crisis Group publications, Asia Report N°147, *Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's Publishing Industry*, 28 February 2008; Asia Report N°142, *"Deradicalisation" and Indonesian Prisons*, 19 November 2007; Asia Briefing N°63, *Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's Current Status*, 3 May 2007; Asia Report N°114, *Terrorism in Indonesia: Noordin's Networks*, 5 May 2006; Asia Report N°92, *Recycling Militants in Indonesia: Darul Islam and the Australian Embassy Bombing*, 22 February 2005; and Asia Report N°83, *Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix*, 13 September 2004.

²Sugandi was born in 1966 in South Sumatra of Javanese parents. When he finished elementary school, his parents sent him to Yogyakarta, their hometown, to continue his studies. He was still in a Muhammadiyah junior high school in Sleman, Yogyakarta, in 1983, when he joined an activist Muslim student group, Badan Komunikasi Pemuda Mesjid, led by a young preacher close to Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abdullah Sungkar, co-founders of al-Mukmin Pesantren in Ngruki, Solo. Ba'asyir and Sungkar had just been released from prison after being detained for their fiery criticism of the Soeharto government and were hugely popular in the student community. They were also actively organising cells of the clandestine Darul Islam movement. In 1984, Sugandi enrolled his younger brother in Ngruki, entrusting him to the care of Abu Husna, then a young teacher there. Two years later, he was inducted into Darul Islam, and shortly thereafter, he abandoned his studies at the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic Institute and signed up for training in Afghanistan.

³Members of his batch included Nuaim alias Zarkasih, head of Mantiqi II from 2001-2004 and appointed "caretaker" amir or leader thereafter; he was sentenced to fifteen years

Java, he married a woman from a Darul Islam family in Purbalingga and tried his hand at various odd jobs, but none lasted very long.⁴ In 1996, he was formally inducted into JI by Abu Rusdan, the Kudus militant who became JI's caretaker *amir* in 2003. A year later, Sugandi went back to South Sumatra, eventually heading the educational program of a village-level Muhammadiyah foundation in OKI. Sugandi says he returned because he could not find work in Java, but he was also almost certainly encouraged to go by the JI hierarchy. This was a period of rapid expansion for the organisation, largely through religious outreach (*dakwah*) and the establishment of satellite schools.⁵ If Sugandi was not directly ordered to return, it at least would have been in line with JI's policies to have him back in Sumatra, preaching and recruiting. Eventually, he built his own school, al-Furqon.

In the course of his *dakwah* activities, Sugandi befriended a young junior high school student, Ali Masyhudi – later to become a member of the Palembang group. In 1999, Sugandi took him to Purbalingga to enroll him in Nurul Huda Pesantren, a school with Darul Islam and JI links.⁶ Sugandi knew its director, Abdul Aziz, but when he delivered Ali Masyhudi, he encountered another man he also knew: Syaifuddin Zuhri alias Sabit alias Sugeng, a JI member from Cilacap, then in his mid-thirties, who was two years behind Sugandi in the military academy in Afghanistan.⁷ Sabit

in prison in 2008. Other members were Nasir Abas, former head of Mantiqi III and now working with the police; and Edi Setiono alias Usman, serving a life sentence for the Atrium Mall bombing of 2001.

⁴One of these was working in a bread factory – interesting because one of the wealthier members of JI from Surabaya had a bread factory that employed dozens of JI members as retailers across Indonesia. It was through that bread factory that JI members first arrived in Palu, where they then set up a branch.

⁵Since the late 1980s, a few Ngruki students had been sent to South Sumatra to carry out their required practice teaching; by 1997, there would have been a small number of Ngruki alumni in the area to work with. See, for example, the list of members in Ngruki class of 1989-1990, two of whom were sent for practice teaching to Ogan Kemiring, the district that included Sugandi's village. "Panca Jiwa Pondok" [Al-Mukmin yearbook], Ngruki, 1995.

⁶One indication of a school's affiliation to JI is whether it advertises in JI magazines. An advertisement for Nurul Huda appears in the April 2009 issue of *ar-Risalah*, published by a JI company in Solo.

⁷They met in 1989 according to Sugandi's testimony. That means Sabit was probably in the eighth batch of Indonesians to go to Afghanistan, in the same class as Fathurrahman al-Ghozi, the JI member who worked with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's Special Operations Group, was arrested

was far more radical than Sugandi, but the Afghan bond was a strong one. When Ali Masyhudi was ready to return to South Sumatra in 2004, Sabit and Abdul Aziz accompanied him.

III. FAJAR TASLIM ARRIVES IN PALEMBANG

That same year, in August 2004, Mohamed Hassan bin Saynudin alias Fajar Taslim arrived in Palembang. He was to have a deeply radicalising influence on a small group of local activists; without him, the Palembang group would not have come into being.

Fajar had been inducted as a JI member in 1998 and sent to Afghanistan for five months' military training in 2000 through the good offices of Hambali.⁸ On his return to Singapore, he became a member of the special operations team of the late Malaysian bomb specialist, Dr Azhari Husin.⁹

When Singaporean authorities began a crackdown on the JI cells in late 2001, Fajar and five others – including Mas Selamat Kastari, who was recaptured in April 2009 after a daring 2008 escape from a Singaporean prison – fled to Medan, North Sumatra, and then embarked on an odyssey across Bali, Lombok and Java, finally arriving in JI headquarters in Solo, Central Java, in February or March 2002. There JI's acting *amir*, Abu Rusdan – the same man who inducted Ani Sugandi – assigned them to different areas, instructing them to live like civilians and blend in with the population. He also dubbed them the "No Action Group", saying they were not to engage in any *amaliyah*, or military operations, while in Indonesia.¹⁰

in the Philippines, escaped from a Manila prison, and was captured and shot in Mindanao in October 2003.

⁸Hussein bin Saynudin, his twin brother, received training in Pakistan from Lashkar-e-Tayyaba. Hussein was in Cairo working as a publisher when a crackdown on the Singapore JI structure began in 2001. He decided not to return, but was in periodic contact with his brother until the latter's arrest. He has been under Internal Security Act detention in Singapore since 2007.

⁹In that capacity, Fajar helped purchase materials for the Christmas Eve bombings in Indonesia of December 2000. Dr Azhari was killed after the second Bali bombing in a police operation in Batu, Malang, East Java, in November 2005.

¹⁰"The Fajar Taslim Story", handwritten autobiographical account in the trial dossier of Fajar Taslim alias Mohammad Hassan, Berkas Perkara No.Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

Fajar was assigned to Kudus, Abu Rusdan's hometown, and moved there with his family in July 2002, where he became the responsibility of a senior JI member Taufik Ahmad alias Abu Arinah.¹¹ JI members there were clearly anxious about him. For one thing, he had a Malaysian accent; for another, he was a big man of Indian descent and not easy to hide. He was forbidden to take part in any public gatherings, even to go to the mosque or attend JI religious study sessions.¹² It was worse after the first Bali bombs in July 2002; he and his family were moved around by JI members worried more for their own survival than for Fajar's. At one point, he recounts with some bitterness, he and his wife and three small children were locked in a house for three days without food.¹³ Fajar's Singaporean wife demanded to go home.

In late December 2002, it was deemed safe for Fajar to return to Kudus. But then, in early February 2003, Mas Selamat Kastari was arrested in Tanjung Pinang, Riau, and all JI's anxieties returned. Fajar finally allowed his long-suffering wife and children to go home, and took a local widow, Sayuti, as his second wife. The marriage was largely to provide Fajar with local cover, and he moved with her to her parents' village in Rembang, Java, about three hours from Kudus. With money wired from his brother in Cairo as a wedding present, he and his new wife opened a kiosk selling basic goods, earning enough to make ends meet. They felt reasonably secure even when they got word of police operations in Kudus in April 2003 that led to Abu Rusdan's arrest. But the villagers grew increasingly hostile towards Fajar and Sayuti, particularly when they refused to take part in traditional ceremonies on the grounds that they were idolatrous. Around August 2003, the couple was expelled. Forced to leave all their belongings behind, a nearly destitute Fajar and Sayuti moved to the nearby district of Lasem.

Fajar must have kept up sporadic contact with his JI minders, because in August 2004, they sent a man to tell him that another Singaporean colleague, one of the group of five who fled with him in 2001, had been arrested. They wanted him to leave Java immediately – again, not so much for his safety as theirs. They gave him one-way bus tickets to Palembang for him-

self and Sayuti, then seven months pregnant. It is not clear why they chose Palembang over other places in Sumatra, since they apparently did not make any effort to make introductions to JI members there. It may have been in part because police operations after the 2003 Marriott bombing had already netted members in Medan, Pekanbaru and Bengkulu, and Palembang was the only major Sumatran city left unscathed. The fact that it also had a small Indian community meant that he would be less noticeable than in Java. All JI wanted was to get Fajar off its hands.¹⁴

When they arrived in Palembang, Fajar and Sayuti went to a large mosque and spent the next few nights there. They were befriended by some Indians who took them in, and while Fajar looked for work, he continued going to the mosque to pray. After two weeks, he met a perfume seller and Muslim healer named Abdurrahman Taib, then 34.

Since 2002 Abdurrahman had run a small, informal Muslim study centre in his house called Ma'had Baitul Ilmi, teaching basic Quranic precepts and Arabic. He was only a high school graduate, but he had several friends at the Raden Fatah State Islamic Institute (IAIN), and they took turns teaching or lecturing at his centre. In 2003, one of these IAIN lecturers established a local chapter of FAKTA, the national Jakarta-based group founded to counter Christian efforts to convert Muslims.¹⁵ Abdurrahman and several others involved in Ma'had Baitul Ilmi became members, and in the study sessions at his house, he began to focus his preaching on the dangers of "Christianisation".

After Fajar settled in Palembang, hiring himself out as an English teacher, he joined Abdurrahman's study group and began leading discussions of a much more political nature, about how Muslims were being slaughtered in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine and the need to wage jihad in response.¹⁶

Sometime thereafter – Sugandi recalls it as November 2004 but it might have been earlier – Sabit, the Afghan veteran from Cilacap, made his first visit to Sugandi's school.¹⁷ He and Abdul Aziz were accompanying Ali

¹¹ Taufik Ahmed is the son of the late Darul Islam leader, Ahmed Husein, who helped recruit Abu Bakar Ba'asyir into the DI organisation in 1976, and who worked closely with Abu Rusdan's father, Haji Faleh.

¹² "The Fajar Taslim Story", op. cit.

¹³ Ibid. He also recalls that at one stage his eldest son, then five years old, was forcibly taken away to a *pesantren*, because JI cadres were worried that his tendency to chatter in English would give them away.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The Palembang chapter had no regular communication with the national office of FAKTA in Jakarta, led by Abu Deadat.

¹⁶ Testimony of Agustiwarman, 11 September 2008, in trial dossier Berkas Perkara No. Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

¹⁷ In the course of his 2009 trial, Fajar revealed that he had known Sabit in Malaysia. (See Abdurrahman Taib, "Pledoi di Pengadilan Jakarta Selatan", 31 March 2009.) This may have been when he was first inducted into JI in 1998, when

Masyhudi back, but it may not have been a coincidence that they came just weeks after the Australian embassy bombing of 9 September 2004.¹⁸ They stayed at Sugandi's school for a week, during which Sabit tried to convince Sugandi to join his group – which was apparently closely linked to Noordin Top.¹⁹ Sugandi, whose own lectures focused on the theory of jihad but not on the need for immediate operations, declined. He asked Sabit for help, however, in recruiting more teachers for the school.

In late December 2004, just after the tsunami devastated Aceh – a chronological marker that everyone in Indonesia remembers – Sabit found a young unemployed man named Sukarso Abdillah, then studying the Quran with an imam in Cilacap. Sabit told him how to get to Sugandi's school, and Sukarso left to take up his new job, together with two other young men, Helmi Hanafi and Yudho Hastoyo alias Yudo, who also were Sabit's protégés.²⁰ In addition to teaching, Sukarso worked as a tapper in Sugandi's small-holder rubber plantation and did odd jobs around the *pesantren*. He also stayed in touch with Sabit – every year when he went home to see his family for the holiday at the end of Ramadan, Sabit would get in touch.²¹

In early 2005, Sugandi went to Purbalingga to visit his in-laws, and then on to Kudus to see the man he called "my superior" in JI, Taufik Ahmad alias Abu Arinah – the same man who had been responsible for hiding Fajar Taslim in 2002-2003. Sugandi says he asked Taufik about Sabit, and Taufik replied that Sabit's thinking was not in line with theirs; he was now "outside our group", that is, outside the JI mainstream.²²

the JI school, Lukmanul Hakiem, in Johor, Malaysia was still flourishing. If Sabit had known Fajar was in Palembang, one would think they would have tried to make contact, but there is no indication at the time of this visit that Sugandi had met Fajar yet or that Fajar and Sabit were in communication.

¹⁸There is no mention in any of the testimonies of the impact of the bombing, nor did police interrogators ask about it, but it must have been discussed in these circles at the time.

¹⁹Testimony of Ani Sugandi, 15 September 2008, in trial dossier Berkas Perkara No.Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008. At this point, Noordin was moving between Pekalongan and Semarang, but was actively trying to recruit people through couriers. See Crisis Group Report *Terrorism in Indonesia: Noordin's Networks*, op. cit.

²⁰Testimony of Sukarso Abdillah, 8 July 2008, and Ani Sugandi, 15 September 2008, in trial dossier Berkas Perkara No.Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

²¹Testimony of Sukarso Abdillah, op. cit.

²²Testimony of Ani Sugandi, op. cit.

Taufik's response was in line with his close friend Abu Rusdan's instructions to Fajar Taslim and his friends in early 2002: after the first Bali bombs, JI was not interested in further al-Qaeda-style operations.

Noordin Top, however, went his own way, first with the Marriott bombing in August 2003 and the Australian embassy bombing in September 2004, and now Sabit was talking about continuing in the same fashion. One question is how much Taufik knew (or knows) about Sabit's group and who was involved. Another is how much Taufik told Sugandi about Fajar Taslim. By this time, Fajar had revealed his true identity to Abdurrahman and another FAKTA member, Agustiwarman, who were shocked – until then, they had thought JI was a completely fictitious organisation, created by the U.S. to justify bringing the war on terror to Indonesia.²³ If Sugandi was not told about Fajar by Taufik or Sabit, he would have learned shortly anyway.

A few months later, Sugandi went to Palembang to officially register his *pesantren* with the provincial religious affairs office. Since he had to stay overnight, he called a FAKTA member he knew who suggested that he meet Abdurrahman Taib, who was running FAKTA's educational activities. Abdurrahman invited him to stay at his house and give a lecture to his study group, which he did. Fajar Taslim was present; so were four men who would later become the operatives of the Palembang group:

- Agustiwarman was in his mid-30s, married, a university law graduate, civil servant and employee of the provincial prison administration. He was one of the original members of Ma'had Baitul Ilmi and the FAKTA branch.
- Heri Purwanto was 23, unmarried, with no steady job. He was a high school graduate who had studied for two semesters at a local private university. At the time of his arrest, he was selling vouchers for mobile phones.
- Sugiarto, then twenty, was in his sixth semester at the Raden Fatah State Islamic Institute, and only came into contact with the group because he needed a room to rent. He found one in the house of Oloan Martua Harahap, secretary of the FAKTA branch, who ran an internet café out of his home. Sugiarto worked part-time as a computer technician for Oloan; he was later selected for special training in bomb-making.

²³"The Fajar Taslim Story", op. cit., and Abdurrahman Taib, "Pledoi", op. cit.

- Wahyudi, then 32, with only a junior high school education, seems to have been unmarried with no steady employment. He had worked for three months as a helper in an auto mechanic's shop, and at the time of his arrest was working as a night watchman at the home of the parents of a FAKTA officer.

From this point on, there began to be sporadic communication between the two groups: Abdurrahman would occasionally come to Sugandi's *pesantren*, especially after he enrolled his son there; Sugandi would stay with Abdurrahman whenever he had business in the city. By mid-2005, Fajar's jihadi influence was already beginning to make itself felt on the FAKTA group. A more charismatic figure was about to arrive at al-Furqon who would reinforce that process.

IV. SULTHON QOLBI ARRIVES

Sometime around August 2005, another fugitive named Sulthon Qolbi arrived at Sugandi's school with his wife.²⁴ He was a leader of Mujahidin KOMPAK (Komite Aksi Penanggulangan Akibat Krisis, roughly Action Committee for Crisis Response) from Madura who lived in Ambon from 1999 to 2005, took part in numerous attacks there, then fled after a wave of arrests began in May-June 2005.²⁵ In Ambon he used the aliases Asadollah and Arsyad. In Palembang, he became known as Ustad Abum.

In his defence plea, Sugandi said he never invited Sulthon to his school, but as a Muslim, he had no choice but to take in a fellow human being in need.²⁶ He said a man named Rusdi alias Azmi, a graduate of al-Husein *pesantren*, the now defunct II-linked school

in Indramayu, suddenly showed up at his door with Sulthon Qolbi, saying they had been told about Sugandi by a mutual acquaintance, Zamzam, whom Sugandi does not remember.²⁷

A week after he arrived, Sulthon told Sugandi that he had been involved in a number of incidents in Ambon and was wanted by police. Sugandi said he could stay as an Arabic instructor, but Sulthon immediately began preaching a more confrontational line than Sugandi himself was comfortable with. He taught that jihad against Jews and Christians was an individual obligation (*fardu 'ain*) because they were occupying Muslim lands, urged jihad against the Indonesian government because it did not apply Islamic law and argued that Muslims should make war on the U.S. and its allies because they were responsible for crimes against the Muslim world. He also regaled his listeners with tales of his exploits in Ambon, including attacks on Christian villages.²⁸ Much later, after Sulthon was arrested, tried, convicted and sent to prison in Ambon, prison authorities asked to have him moved because he was so successful in recruiting other prisoners.²⁹ Like Fajar, he was a natural leader, with immense personal charm.

After Sulthon had been teaching for several months, Abdurrahman Taib arrived to visit his son, accompanied by members of his study circle: Agustiarman, Heri Purwanto, Sugiarto and Fajar. Fajar recalls the visit as March 2006 but it may have been a little earlier. They wanted to meet Sugandi, but since he was busy with other things, he left them with Sulthon. They were deeply impressed by his passion and religious knowledge, particularly Fajar, who acknowledged frankly that his own lectures were beginning to wear thin, and this man infused new spirit into the group.³⁰ After that initial meeting, Abdurrahman's group came regularly to see Sulthon. Relations between Sugandi and Sulthon deteriorated, however, as their ideological differences became more pronounced.

In May 2006, Fajar got a shock when one of his employers at the Cambrichindo English language institute told him that four men had come around, asking if he or a Singaporean named Mohammad

²⁴From the testimony he gave in Ambon, Sulthon was in hiding in Ambon for about two weeks from 18 May. He then left for Surabaya and Madura, where he stayed about a month or slightly longer. The earliest he could have arrived in Palembang would thus have been July and it was probably a little later. Fajar in "The Fajar Taslim Story" mentions Sulthon's wife was in the *pesantren* with him.

²⁵Sulthon was on the police wanted list in connection with an attack on a Brimob post in Loki, West Ceram, in May 2005. According to the interrogation deposition prepared in February 2007 before his trial in Ambon, he was involved in the February 2005 attack on the ship Lailai 7; the March 2005 car bomb attack in Batu Merah and the Lateri bombing, both in Ambon; and the Loki attack (in his deposition he said he gave the orders and held planning meetings at his house; in the testimony of another participant, he also supplied the weapons used). See testimony of Sulthon Qolbi, BAP No. Pol. T/18.a/II/2007/ Ditreskrim, February 2007.

²⁶Ani Sugandi, "Rislalah Pembelaan di Pengadilan Negeri Jakarta Selatan", Jakarta, 31 March 2009.

²⁷Sukarso Abdillah, the young teacher from Cilacap, tells a different story. He said Sugandi was still trying to increase his teaching staff, and sent word to a friend in Madura named Rusdi that he needed another instructor. Some months later, Rusdi showed up with Sulthon, and left him there to teach. Sukarso Abdillah testimony, op. cit.

²⁸Ibid, and Ani Sugandi testimony, op. cit.

²⁹Crisis Group interview, police official, Ambon, 30 March 2007.

³⁰"The Fajar Taslim Story", op. cit.

Hassan was working there. Panicked, he called all the places he was teaching and asked for leave on the grounds that his father was ill. Then he asked Agustiarman to take him to Sugandi's *pesantren*. Three days later, his wife and child followed. Sugandi agreed to take them in, on the grounds that they stay quietly in the *pesantren* and not go anywhere or do anything.

For the next three months Fajar and Sulthon overlapped at the *pesantren*, both committed jihadis but Sulthon more reluctant to contemplate a new operation because he was still being hunted by police.³¹ Fajar decided to try and prod him into action – "I kept provoking him for a month", he recalled proudly.³² Eventually Sulthon capitulated and agreed to join their group. Around late July or early August, Fajar left Sugandi's school to go back to Palembang, in part because he worried that the young FAKTA members would lose their enthusiasm for jihad in his absence. A week later, Sulthon followed.³³ Fajar found a place to live in Sumbawa village, about 10km outside Palembang.

It was here, sometime in August 2006, that members of the Palembang group gathered to form a new *jama'ah*. The meeting – outside, at night, in the middle of a rubber plantation – underscored the clandestine nature of the new organisation, set up to undertake operations against Islam's enemies.³⁴ The initial members were Abdurrahman Taib, Fajar Taslim, Sulthon Qolbi, Heri Purwanto, Agustiarman, Sugiarto, Wahyudi, a local villager named Yosi and Oloan Martua Harahap, the FAKTA secretary who employed Sugiarto. They chose Abdurrahman Taib as their *amir* and swore an oath of loyalty to him. Sugandi and Sukarso Abdillah attended the meeting but did not take the oath, on the grounds that they were already bound to another organisation – presumably JI.

The formation of the *jama'ah* represented the efforts of three men, Fajar, Sulthon and Abdurrahman Taib. Fajar found a group of young activists in Palembang and gave them a new political focus and ideological purpose. Sulthon may have been a reluctant participant, but his teaching reignited the group at a point when its motivation seemed to be waning. Abdurrahman Taib was a local player eager to strut on a larger

stage, precisely the sort of person who would listen to Fajar and Sulthon, and whose study group went where he led them.

V. THE BUNGLED ATTACK IN BANDUNG

The *jama'ah* discussed plans for operations at the very first meeting in the rubber plantation. The proposed targets were all Christian priests who, in their view, were actively hurting Islam through blasphemy or attempts at conversion. None of those mentioned was known personally to any member of the group. Fajar Taslim says they got the names from FAKTA (lists of such individuals are easily available on blogs and websites), but while FAKTA aimed at stopping such men through non-violent advocacy, the Palembang group aimed to kill them.³⁵

The first two possibilities discussed were Rev. Robert Paul Walean and Rev. Rudy Muhammad Nurdin. Walean is a Jakarta-based Adventist pastor who founded the Islam al-Hanif Foundation that, among other things, translates Quranic verses as if they were Biblical passages. FAKTA's national founder, Abu Deedat, specifically attacks Walean in a number of articles for blasphemy.³⁶ Nurdin, based in Grogol, West Jakarta, is also singled out in FAKTA publications for writing books with covers in Arabic and Indonesian and titles designed to appeal to Muslim audiences, such as *The Most Important Verses of the Quran*. According to FAKTA, he teaches that the Prophet Muhammad had a Christian wife and memorised the Bible.³⁷

Sometime in September 2006, Wahyudi and Heri Purwanto were sent to Jakarta for an initial survey for the planned attacks; Abdurrahman Taib paid for their travel. Heri came back early because he was ill, and Wahyudi called later to report that Walean lived in a market area too crowded to undertake an execution, and Nurdin had apparently moved from his old address

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sugandi says by the time he left, Sulthon had been about ten months at his *pesantren*. If he arrived in July 2005, this would have made his departure around May. It is more likely then that he arrived somewhat later than Sugandi remembers, in August or September 2005.

³⁴ Abdurrahman Taib testimony, 12 September 2008, in Berkas Perkara No. Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

³⁵ "The Fajar Taslim Story", op. cit. For one example of an apostasy blacklist, see <http://pemurtadan.blog.friendster.com/> and a list entitled "Tokoh-tokoh institusi Kristen yang melancarkan aksi pemurtadan berkedok Islam di bumi Pancasila [leaders of Christian institutions who engage in conversion efforts with a Muslim slant in Pancasila country]".

³⁶ Abu Deedat also accuses Walean of joining al-Qiyadah, a sect deemed deviant in 2008 by the Indonesian Ulama Council. See for example www.dakta.com/view_artikel_khusus.php?id=5.

³⁷ See www.swaramuslim.net/fakta/html/001/index.php?page=BB.

because he was being sought by police on blasphemy charges.³⁸

Fajar claims it was he who suggested targeting Rev. Yosua Winadi, a 26-year-old Muslim convert to Christianity, based in Bekasi, outside Jakarta. Yosua belonged to the Golden-Footed Torch Foundation (Yayasan Dian Kaki Emas), another evangelical organisation on FAKTA's blacklist. Led by converts from Islam, it uses materials in Arabic to preach Christian values to Muslims.³⁹ Yosua had been a *pesantren* student in Lamongan, East Java, was himself fluent in Arabic, and had issued a CD with songs in Arabic in the style of Muslim music that praised Jesus.⁴⁰

Wahyudi managed to find out that Yosua would be inaugurating a new Christian school in Bandung in a few weeks and was temporarily living there. He then got a new assignment from Palembang: go to Bandung, find Yosua and pretend to become his student. It turned out Oloan Harahap had a friend, Timotius, who could introduce Wahyudi to the young pastor. Calling himself Gunawan, Wahyudi went to Yosua's house, professed an interest in studying Christianity, and was welcomed as a guest. Yosua started teaching him the Bible that night.⁴¹

About a week later, Timotius called from Jakarta, saying that Abdurrahman Taib, Heri Purwanto and Yosi had arrived from Palembang. Since Yosua coincidentally had an engagement just outside Jakarta, Wahyudi asked to go along. He told Yosua that he had three friends who had just arrived in Jakarta and were also interested in becoming Christians, made the introductions to the travellers, and the following day, the whole group left together for Bandung.⁴²

The next day, 16 October 2006, Timotius called Yosua and said he wanted to make a contribution to his Christian outreach activities and asked if they could meet that evening in Lembang, a resort town just outside Bandung. Yosua agreed, and Timotius said he would send his driver to Yosua's house. That evening, Sulthon, who had been designated in Palembang as

the executioner and who had arrived in Bandung separately, showed up at Yosua's house with another man named Iwan, described by Abdurrahman Taib as an *ikhwan*.⁴³ Yosua gave Iwan the keys to his car, got in beside him with Wahyudi and Sulthon sat in the back, and they started on the road to Lembang.

When they reached a deserted stretch of road, the less than foolproof murder plan began to go into operation. One of the men in the back reached forward and put a plastic string around Yosua's neck while the other began pounding on his head with a wooden hammer with nails embedded in it: the group had nothing fancier.⁴⁴ Fajar Taslim wrote:

I still remember Ust. Abum [Sulthon] wrapping up a hammer from the home of Abdurrahman, and I said, "What, you're going to use a hammer? Don't use a hammer, use rope!"⁴⁵

Yosua managed to open the door of the car and throw himself out, with no life-threatening injuries. Unnerved, Iwan sped off with Sulthon and Wahyudi, only to crash the car shortly thereafter. A crowd of villagers caught Sulthon and turned him over to the police; Wahyudi and Iwan got away and made their way back to Palembang.⁴⁶

After this debacle, Oloan Harahap and Yosi asked and received permission to leave the *jama'ah*, but two others quickly took their place: Ki Agus Muhammad Toni, a student at Sugandi's *pesantren*, and Ali Masyhudi, Sugandi's protégé, swore allegiance to Abdurrahman Taib.⁴⁷ These two had no connection to FAKTA.

Police in Cimahi, Bandung, meanwhile, had no idea that the man they arrested after a car crash and assault on a pastor was on a national wanted list for multiple crimes in Ambon.⁴⁸ Some six weeks later, his wife

³⁸ Testimony of Wahyudi, 5 July 2008 in trial dossier Berkas Perkara No. Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

³⁹ The founder of Yayasan (Foundation) Dian Kaki Emas, Rev. Edi Supto, is a convicted murderer who found Christianity in prison and became a pastor after his release. A native of Madura, he is a frequent target of attacks in the hardline Islamic media. See for example http://swaramuslim.net/fakta/more.php?id=5574_0_16_0_M.

⁴⁰ "The Fajar Taslim Story", op. cit.

⁴¹ Wahyudi testimony, op. cit.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Bandung, 2007.

⁴³ The term *ikhwan* (Arabic for brothers) is usually used to refer to fellow members of the same organisation or same ideological persuasion. JI members call each other *ikhwan*. In this case, Iwan was from Bandung, according to Taib, and therefore clearly was not a member of the Palembang group. He was therefore likely JI, Darul Islam or a member of another group called Jama'ah Tauhid wal Jihad, founded by Oman Rochman alias Aman Abdurrahman.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, source who helped Yosua shortly after incident, Bandung, 10 April 2007. The trial testimonies mention only a hammer.

⁴⁵ "The Fajar Taslim Story", op. cit.

⁴⁶ Wahyudi testimony, op. cit.

⁴⁷ The ceremony took place at Heri Purwanto's brother's house, indicating how easily family members can become involved.

⁴⁸ It is not clear why the link was not made initially. It may have been that the Maluku police at that stage did not know

arrived at al-Islam *pesantren* in Lamongan – a JI school with strong KOMPAK connections – and sought help of friends there to secure her husband's release. Word got back to Ali Imron, the Bali bomber whose family runs that school and who since 2002 has been working with police, that the man the Bandung police were holding was no petty criminal but the mastermind of the May 2005 attack in Maluku that had killed five police officers. He told the police in Jakarta, who told the police in Bandung, who told the police in Ambon – and in early December 2006, Sulthon was transferred back to Ambon for trial. At that point, all interest ceased in the attempted murder. Yosua, fearful of another attack, left Java for another island, and the Ambon police never questioned Sulthon about what he was doing in Bandung. If they had, the Palembang group might have been uncovered much earlier.

VI. GETTING ARMS AND EXPLOSIVES

For the first month after the botched murder attempt and Sulthon's arrest, everyone was tense. Fajar warned the *jama'ah* that Sulthon would likely reveal information, and they should be prepared to move. But Sulthon never said a word. Even when he was reinterrogated in 2008, after the Palembang group was exposed, he did not give up a single useful fact.⁴⁹ When it seemed that they were safe after all, the group, with Fajar's encouragement, began thinking about next steps.

In late 2006 or January 2007, Sabit returned to al-Furqon.⁵⁰ The next day, according to Sugandi, Abdur-

Sulthon's real name (in Ambon he was known as Asadollah or Arsyad) or have a photograph of him to circulate nationally. Also, no system is in place to profile certain kinds of common crimes so that they get special attention. Murders or attempted murders of pastors or attacks on churches would be one such category; so would robberies of gold stores since in the past such crimes have been used as fundraising methods by jihadi groups. Finally, while police capacity has improved significantly in recent years, it would simply not occur to many district-level police that there was any reason to be on the lookout in Bandung for a fugitive from Ambon.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group has seen his testimony and virtually every response to the interrogator is that he does not know or cannot remember.

⁵⁰ Ani Sugandi's testimony places this meeting in 2005, Abdurrahman Taib's in early 2007, but from the context, it has to be the latter date. The reference to 2005 could also have been a typo on the part of the interrogators. On his return to the school, Sabit was accompanied by a man named Faiz whom police have never identified and brought

rahman Taib visited with all the remaining *jama'ah* members to attend a *taklim* (religious study gathering) at the school, in which Sabit was the main speaker. In the course of his remarks, he said his group followed the ideological direction of Osama bin Laden and that Muslims must wage jihad against the U.S. and its lackeys.⁵¹ Afterwards, he and Abdurrahman Taib had a private conversation, almost certainly about procuring arms as subsequent developments were to show.⁵²

Sometime in February 2007, Sabit sent a short text message to Abdurrahman and followed up with a phone call, asking him to come to Kroya, a subdistrict of Cilacap. They met at a mosque near the Kroya train station, and Sabit then took Abdurrahman to another location where he handed over a fully loaded Smith and Wesson .38 calibre revolver, as well as eleven additional bullets. He told Abdurrahman that the gun was for the Palembang *jama'ah*, to be used for operations or *fa'i*, robbery of non-Muslims to raise funds for jihad.⁵³ Abdurrahman then returned to Palembang.

Now that they had a weapon, there was a real incentive to use it. They immediately began making plans. In March 2007, they held a meeting at Sugandi's *pesantren*, although he was not present, and decided to undertake a *fa'i* operation in Lampung to raise funds. Ali Masyhudi and Sugiarto were selected to go to Lampung by bus and do a preliminary survey of gold shops and Chinese-owned stores; Agustiawarman and Abdurrahman Taib would follow on a motorcycle, carrying the gun. Once they had decided on the target, Fajar Taslim would join them. The first four departed, but on the very first day of the survey, one of them called back to Palembang to say that Ali Masyhudi had been arrested, while "going past a police post with a sharp weapon" (a knife). He had been riding around on Agustiawarman's motorcycle to look for a target and was going by a police checkpoint when he was stopped. These checkpoints are usually just money-making operations for the local police; they check drivers' documents and collect informal payments. Ali Mashyudi had no license and no vehicle documents, so police kept him in a lock-up overnight and confiscated the motorcycle. Agustiawarman had to come the next day and get him out. The robbery

a few more teachers for Sugandi, most from the Cilacap-Banyumas area. One was a graduate of another JI-affiliated school, al-Muttaqien in Jepara, Central Java, showing the close relations among these schools.

⁵¹ Abdurrahman Taib testimony, op. cit.

⁵² Ani Sugandi testimony, op. cit.

⁵³ Abdurrahman Taib testimony, op. cit. No information is available on how Sabit got the weapon.

plans were cancelled as a result, and everyone returned home.⁵⁴

In May, Sabit invited Abdurrahman Taib for another visit to Kroya, and he went. There Sabit revealed that he was in direct communication with Noordin Top, and he urged Abdurrahman to tell his followers when he returned to Palembang that Abdurrahman himself had met with Top, just to give them added motivation, even though it was untrue.⁵⁵ Sabit also was clearly trying to give Abdurrahman encouragement to undertake a jihad operation in a place within relatively easy reach of Palembang: he told him that Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, was a big tourist destination with many American visitors, and the *jama'ah* could make them a target. The idea may have come directly from Top, who lived in Bukittinggi from mid-2002 to January 2003.⁵⁶

Three days after this meeting, Sabit introduced him to a man named "Aji", a bomb-making specialist, whom Sabit had delegated to train the *jama'ah*. Aji's true identity is not clear, but one possibility is that Aji is a pseudonym for Reno alias Tedi, the man who escaped when Dr Azhari was shot in November 2005.⁵⁷ Abdurrahman and Aji left for Palembang the same day, with Aji bringing twenty kilograms of potassium chlorate with him on the bus in a large cardboard box.

As the irrepressible Fajar notes:

It turned out Aji was going to teach us how to make "cake" – meaning bombs! I consulted with Abdurrahman and we decided that Sugi [Sugiarto] was the one to be trained because he was bright and still young, so he could quickly pick up Aji's teachings. So I moved my family to a new rental house in Kuburan Cina 4, near Abdurrahman's house in Lebong Sireang, and the new place became the headquarters for training in how to "bake a cake". It was delicious, that cake, really tasty!⁵⁸

On the same day they arrived, Abdurrahman summoned Sugiarto to meet Aji. In a business-like way, Aji took out a notebook, wrote down all the additional supplies that were needed for bomb construction – batteries, cables, pipes, switches, circuit boards, soldering irons, glue, sulphur, tupperware and so forth – which came

to a total of Rp.350,000 (about \$35). Sugiarto was sent off to do the shopping, came back with the supplies, and the training began in Fajar's new house.⁵⁹

VII. THE ATTACK ON DAGO SIMAMORA

Meanwhile, through FAKTA, the *jama'ah* learned that a Christian teacher in Palembang was trying to convert his Muslim students and urging the girls not to wear headscarves. Dago Simamora, 59, was a citizenship education teacher at a state junior high school in Palembang; he was also a Protestant pastor. Fajar, Abdurrahman, Agustiawarman and Wahyudi met to discuss the issue and decided to send Wahyudi on a fact-finding mission. He went to the school, posing as a Muslim garment vendor, and engaged some of the Muslim students in conversation. They confirmed the information about Simamora – so the *jama'ah* decided to kill him. Fajar was made operations commander, and his first action was to send Wahyudi back to make a survey. Wahyudi and Ki Agus Muhammad Toni (hereafter Toni), posing again as vendors, managed to speak directly with Simamora and found out his home address. Wahyudi made a third survey, this time with Ali Masyhudi, to see what time Simamora came and left the school.

Once the surveys were completed, Fajar chose the execution team: one look-out, two motorcycle drivers, one killer, one commander. Ali Masyhudi was originally chosen as executioner, but Fajar decided he lacked sufficient enthusiasm and replaced him with Toni. After determining the alley that was to be the execution site, the team had two "rehearsals", both of which showed how many things could go wrong: motivation, motorcycle problems, traffic, people suddenly appearing in the alley, even the weather.⁶⁰ But the team eventually decided on a day – 8 June 2007 – and, in their view, carried the operation off without a hitch.

Wahyudi, still in his garment vendor role, was stationed a short distance away from Simamora's house. He took public transport to and from the site. The rest of the team was waiting in a mosque about a kilometre away. Wahyudi called them when Simamora left his house, describing what he was wearing and the motorcycle he was using. The rest of the team, using two motorcycles, followed him to the elementary school where Simamora picked up his nine-year-old son.

⁵⁴ Heri Purwanto testimony, 12 September 2008 and Ali Masyhudi, 6 July 2008 in Berkas Perkara No.Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

⁵⁵ Abdurrahman Taib testimony, op. cit.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group Report, *Noordin's Networks*, op. cit.

⁵⁷ Reno alias Tedi is a graduate of Mahad Aly, a major JI school in Solo. He also is reported to have fought in Ambon.

⁵⁸ "The Fajar Taslim Story", op. cit.

⁵⁹ At some stage in mid-2007, Fajar returned to Sugandi's school with his family to live for two months, but it is not clear when.

⁶⁰ "The Fajar Taslim Story", op. cit.

Fajar ordered Toni and Agustiawarman, on one motorcycle, to go on ahead and station themselves in the alley, but to make sure not to hurt the son when they killed the father. When Simamora drove into the alley, Toni fired one shot to Simamora's head, killing him instantly; the boy survived. Then Toni and Agustiawarman sped away, followed by Fajar and Heri Purwanto, without anyone following them. Everyone arrived at a designated safe house, changed clothes, and pulled off the stickers obscuring their number plates. It was the perfect crime. In the newspapers the next day, the police said the murder was likely the result of a land dispute, and it was not until the Palembang group was arrested in 2008 that the real perpetrators became known.⁶¹

The "success" of the Simamora murder emboldened Fajar and Abdurrahman Taib to try something bigger – the Bukittinggi bombing.

VIII. THE BUKITTINGGI BOMBING THAT NEVER HAPPENED

Plans for the Bukittinggi bombing represented the transition of the Palembang *jama'ah's* focus from the "near" to the "far" enemy" – Christian proselytisers to the U.S. and its allies. The big leap had already been made from non-violent advocacy to willingness to kill. Once the use of violence was accepted, the circle of possible targets could be broadened. Those who provided the weapons also influenced the choice of targets: the man named Aji would not have come all the way from Java to teach the Palembang *jama'ah* just to blow up local Christians.

Aji began teaching Sugiarto, with Fajar and Abdurrahman Taib closely watching, the day after he arrived in Palembang. He had a bomb-making manual with him, but Sugiarto said he found it easier to just learn by example. In just one day, he learned by trial and error to put together a circuit board with a delay mechanism. Over the next two weeks, he used every spare moment in between his classes at the IAIN in Palembang to return to the house to master the electronic circuitry of bombs under Aji's tutelage. Once he had learned how to time delays for a few seconds and for fifteen minutes and how to use alarm clocks and mobile phones as detonators, Aji introduced the subject of how to mix explosives. The final topic was how to package the finished product. The entire "course" took about a month and when Aji was satis-

fied that his student could make bombs on his own, he returned to Java.

A month or two later, Abdurrahman Taib asked Sugiarto to rent a house that they could use for preparation of pipe bombs with the materials left over from Aji's course. With Ali Masyhudi helping out, Sugiarto then prepared four pipe bombs. The idea was that each member of the *jama'ah* would eventually carry one to look for opportunities for operations, or, if a member was about to be captured, the bomb could be used against the police or as a suicide device.⁶² A few members of the *jama'ah*, meanwhile, continued to take part in FAKTA activities, suggesting the anti-apostasy agenda had not been forgotten, even as the *jama'ah* had supplanted it with grander goals.⁶³

In November 2007, Abdurrahman Taib held a *jama'ah* meeting and with Fajar's encouragement, raised the idea of an attack in Bukittinggi – using the idea that Sabit had first suggested.⁶⁴ According to Fajar, he and Abdurrahman assigned Wahyudi the task of surveying the tourist area in Bukittinggi called Kampung Cina, which he understood had many American visitors. A week later, with a bus ticket and Rp.1,000,000 (\$100) for expenses, Wahyudi was on his way. He found Kampung Cina without much difficulty and spent the next few hours looking at cafés and hotels and asking foodstall owners which places had the most tourists and when they were most crowded. When night fell he went to a mosque near the bus terminal and was given a room for the night in a mosque employee's home. The next day he used some of his money to buy various goods small-scale vendors sell to passers-

⁶² Sugiarto testimony, 10 September 2008, in trial dossier Berkas Perkara No. Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

⁶³ In September 2007 FAKTA branches across Indonesia were riveted by reports of "Christianisation through making women pregnant". According to a FAKTA blog, a man studying to be a pastor had approached a Muslim high school student in Palembang with the intention of converting her. He presented himself to her family as a good Muslim and they began dating. She became pregnant and he agreed to marry her but on the condition that she become a Christian. She agreed. Before the wedding could take place, FAKTA-Palembang learned of the case, and Agustiawarman appointed a team of seven to rescue the young woman from apostasy. The family agreed to take her back, and FAKTA provided religious counseling to steer her back to Islam. See <http://timfakta.blogspot.com/2007/09/pemurtadan-dengan-hamilisasi.html>.

⁶⁴ Fajar remembers this meeting as taking place in October; Wahyudi remembers it as August; Agustiawarman and Sugiarto remember it as November. It was almost certainly after Ramadan, which in 2007 ended on 12 October, so November makes more sense.

⁶¹ See www.indonesia.com/sripo/2007/06/09/0906H02.pdf

by – bottled water, hard candy, packets of peanuts and cigarettes. He hawked these at the terminal, both as a plausible cover and to get a little extra money, and then returned to Kampung Cina at dusk. He went back to the area sixteen times, always between 5 and 10 pm, then returned to Palembang to report that the two busiest cafes were Café Bedudel and Café Apache.

A week later the *jama'ah* met to discuss Wahyudi's findings. This was probably late November. They decided a second survey was needed, and sent Wahyudi back, this time with Abdurrahman Taib and Agustiawarman. Wahyudi took them to the mosque employee's house, telling his unsuspecting host that he had brought his friends to see the beauties of West Sumatra.⁶⁵ After two days of surveying, the group decided on Café Bedudel. Abdurrahman returned to Palembang, while the other two stayed in Bukittinggi waiting to hear who would be the "executor" of the operation.⁶⁶ Two days later, they got a call that it was Toni. He arrived on a bus the next morning, carrying the bomb in a satchel. Sugiarto accompanied him; his task was to activate the bomb on arrival, then immediately return to Palembang, which he did. Toni checked into a cheap hotel, and at 6 pm, Agustiawarman picked him up on a motorcycle, and the two of them went off to blow up Café Bedudel, stopping first at a mosque for sunset prayers. Wahyudi stayed at his host's house, waiting for news.

Toni switched on the bomb as they rode toward the café.⁶⁷ Agustiawarman parked the motorcycle about 30m away, and Toni walked into the cafe alone at 6:30 pm. He took a table in the middle of the restaurant, placing the bag with the bomb on the table, then ordered orange juice and fried rice. When the food came, he moved the bag to the chair next to him, and sat facing the cashier while waiting for an appropriate time to detonate the bomb. So as not to arouse suspicion of the patrons, he also ordered two bottles of beer. He calculated that there were about twenty foreigners in the café at the time. He decided the time was right, got set to throw the switch, but then he heard footsteps behind him. He turned around and saw a group of about seven Muslims, including women in headscarves, coming into the café. They sat down at the table next to him. He waited, hoping they would leave before him, and ordered another plate of fried rice. The Muslims were still there at 9 pm, so he

decided to abort the plan. He paid Rp.100,000 (\$10) for the meal, went out to rejoin Agustiawarman, still waiting with the motorcycle, and turned off the bomb. Agustiawarman called Abdurrahman Taib to report failure, took Toni back to his hotel, and went back to stay with his host.

The next day, Sunday, they went back to Café Bedudel after sunset prayers with the bomb once again turned on. Agustiawarman waited outside while Toni went in as before. Again there were about twenty foreigners mixed in with about five local men. He waited till 9 pm, hoping the locals would leave, but it was the foreigners who left first. Again the bombing was aborted, and they called back to report. This time, Abdurrahman Taib ordered them all to come home.⁶⁸ The next day Toni, Agustiawarman and Wahyudi got on a bus, together with the bomb, and made the 21-hour journey back to Palembang.

Fajar is the only one of the group who seems to have given any thought to the rationale for the bombing, other than to kill Americans who were oppressing Muslims. He wrote that he hoped the bombing would force America to change its policy toward Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶⁹ But there is no indication that the *jama'ah* members sent to Bukittinggi thought in those terms; if they had, they might have detonated the bomb and considered the Muslims collateral damage. They were following the instructions of their *amir* (and Fajar), and there was probably an element of thrill in carrying out an operation, but this was not a group of hardened ideologues with a sophisticated sense of U.S. foreign policy. When Fajar was sentenced, he said of his two co-defendants:

Ali Masyhudi had a junior high school education, Wahyudi only graduated from elementary school. They are good Muslims and good citizens. They are the simplest and purest people I have ever met. It was as though I met two cats in Palembang that I painted orange and black to make them seem like tigers, then I taught them to act like real tigers! But when Detachment 88 [the counter-terror police] washed off the paint, what was left are the two cats you see beside me.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Wahyudi testimony, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ All the information in this paragraph is from the testimony of Ki Agus Muhammad Toni, 12 September 2008, in trial dossier Berkas Perkara No.Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Testimony of Fajar Taslim, 5 July 2008, in trial dossier Berkas Perkara No.Pol. BP/05/IX/2008/ Densus, 25 September 2008.

⁷⁰ "Pledoi di Pengadilan Negeri Jakarta Selatan", op. cit.

IX. MORE FAILURES, THEN ARREST

In December 2007, there was another failed attempt at an operation. As Christmas approached, Abdurrahman Taib called a meeting to discuss an attack on the Maranatha Church in Palembang because the church was inviting street children and poor people to take part in Christmas celebrations – in his view, with the goal of converting them.⁷¹ Sugiarto, Toni, Heri Purwanto, Wahyudi, Ali Masyhudi and Fajar were assigned to burn down the church. Abdurrahman went off to another meeting to establish an alibi, in case anything went wrong, and prove that FAKTA was not involved.⁷² The group left for the church at 3 am carrying seven litres of gasoline and a pack of matches. But it turned out a lone fried rice seller was out in front of the church and intended to be there until dawn. The plans were shelved, and everyone went back to their respective homes.⁷³

In January 2008, Abdurrahman called another meeting at his house, this time for a *taklim*. Sabit, who came with Sugandi, was present. This colleague of Noordin's must have been frustrated by the incompetence or lack of determination of the Palembang group. He urged those present to wage jihad against Americans and their allies and generally tried to motivate them.⁷⁴ Six months later, in June, he called Abdurrahman Taib and asked him to come to Java again. They met as usual at the mosque near the Kroya train station. Sabit turned over an additional twenty kilograms of potassium chlorate and asked Abdurrahman to choose another target in Sumatra that Americans frequented, perhaps Danau Toba, the huge lake in North Sumatra, or something in Palembang.⁷⁵

When Abdurrahman returned to Palembang, he and Fajar discussed other ideas but only to flag them as possibilities, not as serious plans. They included:

- ❑ An attack on a proposed Singapore army training centre in Baturaja, South Sumatra. Fajar said he learned from television and newspapers that Singapore wanted to rent the site but eventually, the Indonesian parliament rejected the idea.
- ❑ Placing a bomb in the parking lot of the Supreme Court in Jakarta when or if plans for the execution of the Bali bombers were announced.

- ❑ Killing a young American English teacher named Samuel who taught at a local high school.⁷⁶

These ideas were never discussed with other members of the *jama'ah*.

On 29 June, Fajar Taslim's wife called Abdurrahman to say her husband had been arrested. Immediately Abdurrahman summoned Agustiawarman and Sugiarto, and they moved twenty bombs that had been stored at Agustiawarman's house and others stored at Abdurrahman's house and moved them all to the house where Wahyudi worked as a watchman. Sugiarto went to Fajar's house, took a bomb out of his clothes closet, and dismantled it.

All the other members of the group were arrested on 1 July 2008. According to the Indonesian police, they had all been under surveillance for more than a year. The initial focus on Palembang was triggered after the second Bali bombing in October 2005 by the hunt for Noordin Top and Reno alias Tedi, Dr Azhari's star bomb-making pupil. Persistent rumours about Palembang as a possible haven for Noordin swirled around Jakarta in 2006 even as Singaporean authorities and Interpol were pursuing Fajar. But even with the surveillance operation in place, the counter-terrorism police were so focused on trying to find Noordin, and on outsiders coming into Palembang, that they seem to have missed some of the activities of the *jama'ah* members themselves. Not only did they not pick up the "rehearsals" for the Dago Simamora killing, but they accepted the local police's explanation that the murder was over a land dispute. When Wahyudi, Sugiarto and Agustiawarman went to Bukittinggi, police were right behind them – except they never discovered they were carrying an activated bomb. In the end, however, every member of the group was identified, and the actual operation to arrest them went reasonably smoothly, with only Abdurrahman Taib resisting.⁷⁷

The trials of the men began later in the year and in April 2009, all were convicted. Fajar got eighteen years; Abdurrahman Taib, Wahyudi, Agustiawarman, Sugiarto, Ki Agus Muhammad Toni and Heri Purwanto, twelve; Ali Masyhudi, ten; Sugandi, five; and Sukarso Abdillah, four.

Sabit and Aji were never caught. It is not just that they remain at large that is worrying; it is that until the Palembang group's activities came to light, neither

⁷¹ Sugiarto testimony, op. cit.

⁷² Ali Masyhudi testimony, op. cit.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Abdurrahman Taib testimony, op. cit.

⁷⁶ Fajar Taslim testimony, op. cit.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, police official, Jakarta, May 2009.

they nor the network in Kroya was on anyone's radar screen.⁷⁸

X. FUNDING FOR JAMA'AH ACTIVITIES

The Palembang *jama'ah* operated on a shoestring budget: its total outlay, for all operations, including travel and incidental expenses, seems to have been under \$2,000. At no time were major purchases required. There was never any vehicle to buy for a car bomb or house to rent for more than a few months at a time. The biggest expenses were roundtrip bus tickets between Palembang and Bukittinggi and the rental of the house where the bomb-training took place. The gun, bullets and potassium chlorate that might otherwise have stretched the group's finances seem to have been turned over free of charge by Sabit, whose own group had a strong interest in turning the Palembang *jama'ah* into a more competent jihadi partner than it ever became.

Not only did it not receive any funds from abroad, but the amount it raised locally was tiny. The main method of fundraising was for members to make a simple proposal for a quasi-religious activity (Islamic healing, for example), then shop it around to local government offices or banks or businesses. No one ever checked to see if the proposed activity actually took place or the organisation behind it was legitimate.

In 2006, for example, Agustiawarman wrote a proposal to send preachers (*da'i*) to lecture around Palembang, and different members of the *jama'ah* took it to

the mosque of Bank Indonesia in Palembang; the cooperative run by the huge local fertiliser company, PT Pupuk Sriwijaya; and other places. From the combined sources they obtained around Rp.2,000,000 (\$200).⁷⁹ In 2007, Agustiawarman prepared another proposal for funding a mass meeting for *ruqiyah* (Islamic exorcism) and healing; it brought it another \$100.⁸⁰ In October that year, the group submitted a proposal to local government agencies and banks in the name of Joint Muslim Forum (Forum Bersama Umat Islam, FBUI). It raised enough to cover Wahyudi's costs for conducting the survey in Bukittinggi. The group raised another Rp.3,000,000 (about \$300) from a proposal to the Palembang municipal government, again ostensibly for sending religious teachers to far-flung areas.⁸¹

In early 2008, Ali Masyhudi took the proceeds from a box for charitable contributions in the mosque near his home; the total amounted to just under \$100. The *jama'ah* also secured periodic cash contributions of Rp.150,000 or Rp.200,000 (\$15 or \$20) at a time from friends or neighbours, but none of the donors knew what the members were planning or asked any questions about how the money would be spent.

Some jihadi groups have been spurred to violence by the sudden availability of funds for the purpose. This clearly was not the case with the Palembang group. It never had very much money to begin with, and it seems to have made plans first and found ad hoc financing thereafter.

XI. CONCLUSIONS

It would be possible to conclude that the Palembang men were hapless bumbling, and if this is all Indonesia has to worry about, it is in good shape. But the Bukittinggi bombing nearly happened, and a similarly amateurish group with the same bombs, the same small financial base and just a little more luck could have a much more lethal effect. One lesson from the Palembang *jama'ah* is that groups with no prior history of involvement in violence or exposure to jihadist ideology can be radicalised through persuasive leaders, and several of the fugitives currently in hiding from the police in Indonesia can play that role, Noordin Top and Reno alias Tedi among them.

⁷⁸ The Palembang testimonies suggest that at one point his network group may have included Sabit; Aji (likely Reno), the bomb-maker; and perhaps Annas, Helmi Hanafi and Yudho Hastoyo alias Yudo, the young teachers that Sabit sent to Palembang. One of the most intriguing friends of Sabit is a man named Baharudin, a community leader (*tokoh masyarakat*) in Cilacap who was also the imam of a mosque there. Sukarso Abdillah recounts that in July 2006 when he had returned from South Sumatra to visit his family, Sabit summoned him to his house and asked him to pose for a few days as Baharudin's son-in-law, Abdul Halim. The next year, at the end of Ramadan, Sabit asked him to do the same. The odd request would make sense if the son-in-law were a fugitive who ordinarily would be expected to take part in family gatherings but could not because he was in hiding or overseas. The only other clue to Abdul Halim's identity is that he once taught in Sulawesi. An Abdul Halim sat on a JI "amir search committee" (Lajnah Ihtiar Linasbil Amir, LILA) with Zarkasih alias Nuaim and Abu Dujana in 2004 but it is not known if this is the same man.

⁷⁹ Testimony of Abdurrahman Taib, op. cit.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

While JI has grown progressively weaker over the last five years, it remains a concern, not so much as a terrorist organisation but as a social network. Nine of ten members of the Palembang group were not JI, but individual JI members outside the organisation's mainstream provided the motivation, instruction and materials that transformed the group into would-be bombers. This radical fringe is probably tiny, but as Fajar Taslim demonstrates, even one charismatic person can make a difference, and the manual for bomb instruction that "Aji" used is still in circulation.

The 50 or so JI-linked schools are still important, not just because they are grooming a new leadership but because sooner or later, one of the most-wanted fugitives will show up at one. From Taufik Ahmad's remarks to Sugandi in 2005, it is fairly clear that JI leaders know where many of these men are, or in fact are protecting them on the condition they not engage in violence that would further damage the organisation. Sulthon was not even a JI member, but he still found refuge at a JI school. More government attention to these schools would be highly desirable.

As noted, the Palembang group underscores the importance of the anti-apostasy agenda in Indonesia, fuelled by efforts of Christian groups to convert Muslims. Fajar Taslim insisted repeatedly that his group had nothing against Christians; it only objected to Christians who were determined to hurt Islam. Indonesian authorities need to protect freedom of religion, but they also need to understand and develop policies to deal with the Muslim backlash to Christian proselytising. Jihadism in Indonesia needs a local driver: anger over Gaza, let alone Afghanistan and Iraq is not enough. With former areas of communal conflict quiet for now, fear of "Christianisation" in some areas could become that driver.

Finally, while police competence and professionalism has improved rapidly in recent years, the Palembang case underscores how much more needs to be done to build basic investigative skills, not only in elite units of the national police but at the local level as well.

Jakarta/Brussels, 20 May 2009

APPENDIX A

PALEMBANG GROUP FINANCES

The following information comes from the interrogation depositions of group members, questioned separately, but the general amounts are consistent.

A. INCOME

1. General operational funds 2006-2007: Rp.7,800,000 (\$780)

2006: Contributions from a bank and local fertiliser company in response to proposal in the name of study group to undertake religious activities and send preachers around the city: Rp.2,000,000 (\$200)

2007: Contributions in response to proposal to conduct public exorcism of djinn (ruqiyah) and an Islamic healing clinic: Rp.1,000,000 (\$100)

2007: Contributions from Palembang city government in response to proposal to send preachers to remote areas: Rp.3,000,000 (\$300)

Oct 2007: Contributions from local government agencies and banks for unspecified religious activities raised in the name of Joint Islamic Forum (Forum Bersama Umat Islam, FBUI) Palembang: Rp.1,000,000 (\$100)

Contributions collected from individuals in the village near al-Furqon *pesantren*: Rp.800,000 (\$80)

2. Funds raised for the 2007 Bukittinggi operation and beyond: Rp.3,832,000 (\$380)

(There is no reason to believe the donors knew how their contributions were to be used.)

Personal contribution from Abdurrahman:	Rp.500,000 (\$50)
Personal contribution from Akbar/Salim:	Rp.30,000 (\$3)
Funds from a mosque charity donations box:	Rp.850,000 (\$85)
Income from an Islamic healing clinic:	Rp.150,000 (\$15)
Personal contribution from Pak Rasman:	Rp.2,000,000 (\$200)
Personal contribution from Pak Habib:	Rp.50,000 (\$5)
Three personal contributions from Ani Sugandi:	Rp.252,000 (\$25.20)

Total funds raised: Rp. 11,632,000 (\$1,163.20)

B. EXPENSES CITED IN TESTIMONIES (INCOMPLETE)

1. Attempted murder of priest (\$100)

Travel expenses of Heri and Wahyudi to Jakarta for fifteen days
(men slept in mosques to avoid accommodation charges): Rp.1,000,000 (\$100)
Travel expenses of other members of team (not mentioned)

2. Murder of Dago Simamora (\$20)

Renting safe house for team to return to and change clothes: Rp.200,000 (\$20)

3. Abdurrahman Taib's travel costs to Java to meet Sabit

(Cost not mentioned)

4. Partial expenses for training in bomb-making: \$55

Electronic and explosive supplies:	Rp.350,000 (\$35)
Renting house, one month:	Rp. 200,000 (\$20)

(Instructor seems to have paid his own way)

5. Partial expenses for Bukittinggi: \$314

Bomb materials (potassium chlorate donated)	
6 glue packs:	Rp.12,000 (\$1.20)
Pellets:	Rp.50,000 (\$5)
4 black bags:	Rp.100,000 (\$10)
1 men's shirt with collar to help bomber blend in:	Rp.35,000 (\$3.50)
Nokia mobile phone:	Rp.150,000 (\$15)
Wahyudi's first survey in Bukittinggi:	Rp.1,000,000 (\$100)
Bus tickets to Bukittinggi for Toni and Sugiarto:	Rp.446,000 (\$44.60)
Operational expenses in Bukittinggi:	Rp.1,200,000 (\$120)
Two nights in a hotel for Toni in Bukittinggi at Rp.75,000 per night:	Rp.150,000 (\$15)

There would have been additional travel and other basic expenses for surveys in Lampung, Jakarta, Palembang and Bukittinggi; phone vouchers and other communication costs; payments to the police for getting the motorcycle back in Lampung after the failed robbery; meals and other supplies. The itemisation above, however, gives an idea of the very low scale of expenses.

APPENDIX B

PARTIAL LIST OF PROMINENT FUGITIVES AS OF MAY 2009

The following men are among those wanted by Indonesian police or other police forces in the region for crimes associated with *JI* and other extremist groups. It is not a complete list, but gives some idea of the kind of people who can help bring in and radicalise new recruits.

Believed to be in Indonesia:

1. *Noordin Mohammed Top*
Born 11 August 1968, Johor, Malaysia; former director of *JI* school Lukmanul Hakiem in Johor that became headquarters for *JI*-Malaysia. Fled to Indonesia in late 2001; mastermind of bombings at Marriott Hotel bombing (August 2003); Australian embassy (September 2004) and Bali II (October 2005). Believed to be in Java in 2006, variously reported in Java and Sumatra 2007.
2. *Reno alias Tedi*
Javanese, mid-30s, reported to be graduate of *JI* school Mahad Aly, Solo. Studied bomb-making with Dr Azhari, helped prepare bombs for second Bali bombing. Fled from Batu, Malang, East Java, when Dr Azhari killed by police in November 2005. Possibly the same as "Aji" who gave taught bomb-making to the Palembang group in 2007.
3. *Syaifuddin Zuhri alias Sugeng alias Sabit*
Javanese, late 30s, Afghan veteran, in communication with Noordin Top 2007, arranged weapons and bomb-training for Palembang group; living in Kroya, Cilacap, Central Java, as of 2007.
4. *Aris Sumarsono alias Zulkarnaen*
Born Gebang village, Sragen, Central Java, around 1963. Was in first group of Indonesians to go to Afghanistan in 1985, arranged logistics for others. Headed *JI*'s military affairs department. Would have been involved at least tangentially in all operations up until Bali I (October 2002). Was reportedly told that Bali I would involve his men but not otherwise included in planning. Might be difficult for Indonesian police to build a strong case against him. Variously reported to be in Solo area or in Mindanao.
5. *Taqwimbillah*
Armed associate of *JI* leader Abu Dujana. Narrowly escaped arrest in Sukoharjo, Solo, Central Java, in June 2007.
6. *Ustadz (Teacher) Rifqi*
Real name not known, about 33, Javanese, Mindanao-trained, began teaching at al-Amanah pesantren, Poso, Central Sulawesi, in 2003; taught military skills to local recruits; fled to Java with Ust. Kholiq, below, and Ust. Yahya. In 2006 helped sell gold jewellery stolen by *JI* in armed robbery.
7. *Ust. Munsip*
Real name not known, Javanese, Mindanao-trained, taught at al-Amanah pesantren, Poso, fled after police operations in January 2007. Fled Poso to Pare-Pare, Sulawesi, in January 2007 together with Dr Agus Purwantoro, (a senior *JI* official arrested in Malaysia in January 2008), then continued on to Java alone. Involved in several crimes in Poso, used funds from 2006 robbery of district head's office. One of senior *JI* members in Poso.
8. *Ust. Kholiq*
Real name not known, Mindanao-trained, taught at al-Amanah pesantren, Poso; help hide weapon after beheading of three schoolgirls. Fled to Java in January 2007 with assistance of Dr Agus Purwantoro.

9. *Ust. Yahya*
In coordination with Abu Fatih, the *JI* leader responsible for Sulawesi, helped arranged the flight of Javanese *ustadz* from Poso to Java via Makassar in January 2007. Treasurer for *JI* in Poso in 2006-7, in 2006 helped arrange of disposal of gold stolen in armed robbery as part of *JI* fund-raising activities.
10. *Enal Ta'o*
Malaysian *JI* member of Tausug descent, 31, involved in a number of murders and robberies in Poso, as well as 2006 attack on the chief of Poso police.
11. *Taufik Bulaga alias Upik Lawanga*
Poso bomb expert known as "the professor", 32, close ties to *JI* Solo, responsible for making May 2005 Tentena bomb.
12. *Tukiadi alias Ilyas*
From Kudus, Central Java. Trainer in Mindanao, studied bomb-making with Azhari 2004.
13. *Asep bin Abubakar alias Darwin*
Took part in 2000 Christmas Eve and 2001 Atrium bombings, thought to have fled to Mindanao but recently reported living in East Kalimantan.

Believed to be in Mindanao

14. *Umar Patek*
Born 1970 in Pekalongan, Central Java of Yemeni descent. Afghan veteran, taught in Mindanao, played major role in first Bali bombing, fled to Mindanao in 2003, reportedly commands unit of foreign jihadis working with Abu Sayyaf Group in Jolo. Married to Filipina.
15. *Joko Pitono alias Dulmatin*
Born 16 June 1970 in Pemalang, Central Java; Afghan veteran; served as electronic technician in 2002 Bali bombing; also involved in 2000 Christmas Eve bombings. Fled to Mindanao April 2003, working with Umar Patek.
16. *Hari Kuncoro alias Bahar*
Dulmatin's brother-in-law, Central Javanese, probably from Solo, Ambon veteran 1999, helped obtain detonating cord from Ambon used in embassy bombing. Involved in sheltering Noordin after Australian embassy bombing, believed to be in Mindanao as of October 2005. More KOMPAK than *JI*.
17. *Muawiyah alias Manobo*
Singaporean national, reportedly went to Mindanao in late 1990s as member of the tablighi Islamic missionary movement, later joined with Umar Patek and Dulmatin, believed to be in Jolo. Never a *JI* member, according to *JI* sources.
18. *Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan*
Malaysian member of *JI*-affiliate KMM and brother-in-law of Atrium bomber Taufik alias Dani.
19. *Ust. Sanusi alias Ishak*
Real name not known, from Tegal, Central Java, trained in Mindanao at Camp Hudaibiyah in 1999-2000, planted idea for attack that led to beheading of three schoolgirls in Poso, October 2005. Reported to have arrived at Camp Jabal Quba in 2006 but no confirmation.

APPENDIX C

MAP OF INDONESIA





International Headquarters

149 Avenue Louise, 1050 Brussels, Belgium · Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 · Fax: +32 2 502 50 38
Email: brussels@crisisgroup.org

New York Office

420 Lexington Avenue, Suite 2640, New York 10170 · Tel: +1 212 813 0820 · Fax: +1 212 813 0825
Email: newyork@crisisgroup.org

Washington Office

1629 K Street, Suite 450, Washington DC 20006 · Tel: +1 202 785 1601 · Fax: +1 202 785 1630
Email: washington@crisisgroup.org

London Office

48 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8LT · Tel: +44 20 7831 1436 · Fax: +44 20 7242 8135
Email: london@crisisgroup.org

Moscow Office

Belomorskaya st., 14-1 – Moscow 125195 Russia · Tel/Fax: +7-495-455-9798
Email: moscow@crisisgroup.org

Regional Offices and Field Representation

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