Geography, Globalization, and Terrorism: 
The Plots of *Jemaah Islamiyah*

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Globalization and terrorism have become connected in many people’s minds. I argue that the technologies of globalization, such as cheap transportation and telecommunications, do not in many circumstances liberate terrorist groups to attack throughout the world or necessarily grant them more power vis-à-vis states. In politically open environments, terrorist networks can behave much like legitimate jet-setting transnational organizations. When terrorist groups face state hostility, many of the tools of globalization become unavailable to them, and their activities become dependent on routes over any advantageous topographical features along states’ boundaries, such as thick jungle, treacherous mountains, and tiny, isolated islands. This not only limits the territorial scope of the group’s activities, but also means that the lack of these advantages can lead to failure. To illustrate this argument, I trace how the Southeast Asian terrorist group *Jemaah Islamiyah* (*JI*) planned two plots in 2000 and 2001: the Christmas Eve 2000 bombings in Indonesia, which succeeded, and the Singapore plots in 2001, which failed. The technologies of globalization were a great deal of help to *JI* during periods of political openness, but when it came under political pressure, the importance of geography and borders returned, particularly with regard to logistics.

The technology and institutions associated with globalization reduce the cost and time needed to communicate, or move people and goods around the

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world. This would seem to empower violent transnational actors at the expense of states. As a result, globalization and terrorism have become connected in many people’s minds. Al Qaeda, after all, reached out from Afghanistan, and using cells located in Germany among other places, attacked the United States. But what effect does globalization actually have on terrorist groups’ operations?

I argue that the technologies of globalization, such as cheap transportation and telecommunications, do not in many circumstances liberate terrorist groups to attack throughout the world or necessarily grant them more power vis-à-vis states. Rather, because they must often covertly move people, weapons, and other goods across international boundaries, transnational terrorist groups are actually significantly constrained by state hostility, and there is little sign that globalization will change this. In politically open environments, terrorist networks can behave much like legitimate jet-setting transnational organizations. When terrorist groups face state hostility, many of the tools of globalization become unavailable to them, and their activities become dependent on routes over any advantageous topographical features along states’ boundaries, such as thick jungle, treacherous mountains, and tiny, isolated islands. This not only limits the territorial scope of the group’s activities, but also means that the lack of these advantages can lead to failure.

To illustrate this argument, I trace how the Southeast Asian terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah, which has been blamed for dozens of attacks since 1999, planned two plots during the politically open period from the fall of Indonesia’s Suharto government in May 1998, to Malaysia and Singapore’s post-9/11 crackdown. Bomb plots are ideal for detailed case studies of the state of a terrorist group’s transnational activities, since they require bringing together people and materials in a specific place at a specific time, a task more complex than any single activity. The successful Christmas Eve 2000 bombings killed over a dozen people across Indonesia, including in Batam, but the plots in Singapore to bomb a train station, as well as attack American and other Western interests in late 2001, were a failure. Planning for both plots began in mid-2000 and used the same command and control structure spread throughout the region. The Christmas Eve 2000 bombings are in some sense the “control”: they are what Jemaah Islamiyah was capable of given maximum political openness and territorial spread. However, when it came to moving the explosives and bombers into Batam and Singapore, JI encountered radically different environments that had a direct impact on the success of each plot. Batam’s geography provides ample opportunities for smuggling, but in a lenient political environment, JI largely ignored these in

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1 See, for example, Phil Williams, “Transnational Criminal Organizations and International Security,” *Survival* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 96–113.
its operations. In Singapore, by contrast, it faced a significantly more hostile government. It was thus forced to look to geography for help in its plans, but Singapore’s geography provided so few advantages that JI was stymied even before the crackdown. The technologies of globalization were a great deal of help to JI during periods of political openness, but when it came under political pressure the importance of geography and borders returned, particularly with regard to logistics.

GLOBALIZATION AND CONCEPTIONS OF TRANSNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUPS

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was fashionable to say that as globalization progressed, borders were ceasing to exist, states would become increasingly meaningless, and geography was irrelevant.\(^3\) Certainly this mode of thinking has shaped the public debate on security issues, leading to concerns that globalization has allowed terrorists to slip the bounds of the state, making it that much more difficult to stop them as they dance around the world just out of the grasp of obsolete nation-states.\(^4\) According to Audrey Kurth Cronin, for example, the international linkages and geographic reach of groups such as al Qaeda are not anomalous, but are here to stay in no small part thanks to globalization. Terrorists are using the tools of globalization to attack the United States. Information technologies have extended terrorists’ communications abilities, terrorist groups are able to organize across international borders, often using the same channels as businesses and NGOs, and the financial resources of terrorist groups are now fully international. The end of terrorist violence is now “to assert identity or meaning against forces of homogeneity, especially on the part of cultures that are threatened by, or left behind by, the secular future that Western-led globalization brings.”\(^5\) Violence has become diffused and internationalized—Michael Mousseau makes the causal mechanism explicit when he argues that terrorist violence can be seen as a response by collectivist-authoritarian societies, with economies based on patron-client relations, to the destabilizing effects of globalization (in the form of market civilization).\(^6\) Diffusion and internationalization of violent groups

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and tactics necessarily make them more complicated to analyze. One way of tackling this problem is looking at terrorists as violent transnational social movements, about which there has been much research in recent years, particularly with regard to violence-prone protest movements. The problem with such a framework is that transnational social movements do not plan attacks, and build and deliver bombs—organizations or networks do. Other analysts have thus begun to argue for viewing terrorist groups as social networks rather than as traditional organizations.

Immediately before 9/11, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt introduced the concept of “netwar.” Their starting point is that advances in information technology have made networks a more powerful form of organization than hierarchies (although this is not the same as saying that networks will triumph in every specific instance). As such, power is shifting in nonstate actors’ favor, since they are more easily able to adopt nonhierarchical, sprawling network forms of organization than are states. Netwar is the form of substate conflict, operating at levels below conventional war, that is most suitable to the use of networks—one where the fighters operate in small, dispersed, yet well-coordinated groups without (much of) a central command. If they are done right, networks can be more powerful than hierarchies, and whoever masters the network form first will be in the better position. Since 9/11, terrorism research has exploded, and Marc Sageman, Ami Pedahzur, and Arie Perliger, among others, have empirically backed up the idea of terrorist groups as networks, showing how the behavior of terrorist groups (and more specifically suicide bomber cells) can best be described by social network analysis with

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9 Ibid. The organization of a network is simply its structure: whether it is organized in a chain, a hub-and-spokes pattern, or “all-channel,” where all (or most) members are connected to each other. All-channel networks are the most resistant to destruction, but also the most difficult to construct. The narrative level involves the collectively held identity of the network members and is vital in holding a leaderless group together: why they formed the network in the first place, who they are (and are not), what makes them different, and what they are trying to accomplish. The doctrinal level is a coherent set of ideas about how the network operates and attempts to accomplish its goals in a coordinated manner. Arquilla and Ronfeldt identify two doctrinal practices that are particularly apt for networks: minimizing the role of stand-out leaders (either by consensus decision making, or by having multiple, dispersed low-profile leaders); and swarming tactics, wherein small, dispersed groups come together suddenly to attack, then disperse. Finally, technological infrastructure refers to appropriate use of information technology (not necessarily the Internet) to further the network’s goals, and social underpinning to the kinship, trust, and friendship that tie together members of the network.

\section*{SITUATING TERRORIST NETWORKS IN SPACE}

Viewing terrorist groups as flat social networks can be a useful way to understand how the members of the group interact with each other, how they recruit new members, and how they choose targets.\footnote{See Max Abrahms, “Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists,” \textit{Security Studies} 16, no. 2 (April–June 2007): 223–53 for a literature review on terrorist groups’ targeting and objectives.} These approaches focus on what the groups are. I argue if we want to think about the effects the technologies of globalization have on terrorist groups, it would be more useful for us to focus on what the groups do, and for that, we need to embed networks’ nodes and flow in space, a point raised by Alexander Murphy. He theorizes that terrorists operate in at least three spaces (activity, policy, and perceptual) and successfully combating these groups requires understanding how they inhabit and adapt to these spaces. The activity space is the physical environment: where terrorists operate, where their facilities are, from where they draw their resources, and where they think it most advantageous to attack. The policy space is “the spatial and geographic implications of government policies” or government behavior relevant to geopolitics that can lead to grievances and conflict. Finally, the perceptual space is essentially the connection between ideology and space: how different spaces are understood, and the symbolic value placed on them by various actors.\footnote{Alexander Murphy, “The Space of Terror” in Susan L. Cutter, Douglas B. Richardson, and Thomas J. Willbanks, eds., \textit{The Geographical Dimensions of Terrorism} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 49.}

Murphy’s framework is a bit too abstract for detailed analysis, but leads us in the right direction. Transnational terrorist groups can be situated in space if we do not think of them as solely organizations or networks, but rather take them as the sum of their transnational activities—namely command and control, and logistics. No matter how a terrorist group is structured, as a hierarchical organization or as a network, in order to carry out violent attacks people within the group have to do the planning somewhere, and coordinate with other people, either with telecommunications or less technologically intensive means such as face-to-face meetings. No matter how loose the network, the terrorists have to get the weapons or explosives from
somewhere and have to get the people and material to the desired location. In short, no matter how transnational they are, the terrorists and their weapons can be located in physical space.

I use the term “networks,” not because the case study in this article, Jemaah Islamiyah, had a flat structure (in fact, in 2000 it was quite a hierarchical, bureaucratic organization), but primarily because I appropriate the concepts of nodes and flows and use them to map terrorist networks’ transnational activities onto territory. This is in keeping with recent work by geographers on globalization, territory, and terrorism. Colin Flint offers a geographer’s take on globalization and security issues, particularly terrorism. The places in which terrorists operate are actually “a product of linkages to regional, national, and global scales.”13 Flint takes Arquilla and Ronfeldt’s concept of netwar and begins the process of placing illicit networks in a spatial dimension. Likewise, Gearoid Ó Tuathail argues that “deterritorialization” is actually just a constant rearranging of territorial understandings, rather than transcending borders. He suggests conceiving of the world not only as made up of changing state-centric maps, but also as maps of flows with “centralized routing stations, interconnected nodes, dense concentrations of flows, and sharp digital divides.”14 Flint agrees, but adds that the nodes of the networks are just as important as flows. After all, he says, “places [are] multifaceted sites for particular types of nodes.”15 Thus, just as a transnational terrorist group is the sum of its transnational activities, a transnational activity is conceptually a series of linked nodes and flows, with flows of people, materials, or information moving between nodes across international borders. The nodes in this article are actually countries or cities (rather than individuals), and the flows are what is moved and how it is moved between nodes (rather than personal ties).

In addition, the links are transnational, at least for the case study in this article: they both cross and sometimes transcend actual physical borders. Paul Ganster and David Lorey note correctly that while globalization has proceeded apace, political boundaries continue to be “pervasive and problematic.”16 One reason is that political boundaries are often the lines at which state power is most evident. For weak states in particular, borders are one of the most visible manifestations of their (sometimes otherwise nonexistent) sovereignty.17 As a result, according to Flint, “terrorists are wary of crossing

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them, and the most likely settings for control nodes are areas that allow movement with minimal state observation—frontier areas where the level of state control is weak.” Although the evidence from Jemaah Islamiyah will not fully bear out this prediction, the implication of Flint’s argument is that the state, in the form of its policies against the group’s activities, affects the location of those activities. The connection between the movements of the group and state hostility will be discussed in the next section.

Terrorist Routes and State Hostility

At the heart of a terrorist group’s activities are what it is the group moves and how it moves it. The routes the group chooses from are influenced by the level of hostility it faces from the states that make up the nodes, if by hostility we mean the state has come out against the group (or one of its activities) and has mobilized enforcement resources against it. Command and control, and logistics both require moving people, material, and information in different proportions. The command and control structure, that aspect of the network through which the leaders direct their subordinates and plan their activities, is the least tied to territory. Time and space are no longer significant barriers, and a leader can in theory lead a group from anywhere in the world using modern telecommunications. But as we will see, telecommunications are not the only means, or even the primary means, for the terrorist leaders to hold their networks together. The plotters in the Jemaah Islamiyah traveled around quite a bit as they planned the attacks.

Logistics, the efforts that go into actually bombing or shooting something, can be considered the activity most tied to the landscape, inasmuch as the network must move both people and material. The network has to figure out how to find a supply of guns or explosives, how to get those materials into the target country (and to the target location), and how to make sure that both the bombers and other plotters, and the bombs themselves are in the right places at the right times.

Given varying levels of state hostility, the terrorist network can choose to move in three different ways. It can make legitimate use of legitimate routes, it can make illicit use of those same legitimate routes, or it can create its own illicit routes that bypass state authority entirely. Routes can either be virtual (in the case of communications) or physical (when the network moves people and material around). Physical routes are simply transportation links, by road, by rail, by sea, or by air. The network will likely mostly make legitimate use of legitimate routes in nonhostile conditions and will only use illicit routes in more hostile environments. In a friendly environment, the network

19 Although this might seem like a tautological definition, for states with weak state capacity, which would include many states in Southeast Asia, the stated hostility of the state against a given group or activity is not necessarily the same as the political pressure actually felt by the group.
J. V. Hastings has no incentive to incur the extra cost, time, and trouble of creating its own illicit routes when it can use the legitimate routes in and around states that in a globalizing world are by and large designed to encourage rapid communication and movement. In a hostile environment, the group might have to resort to bypassing state authority entirely, at additional time and cost. Smuggling people and material through legitimate routes (such as through a government checkpoint) is a bit more complicated and is something the group could conceivably do either in a nonhostile or a hostile environment. Although the terrorist network faces little pressure in a nonhostile environment, it could choose to make illicit use of a legitimate route in order to maintain operational security or avoid angering the state that up to this point has been ignoring it. In a hostile environment, illicitly using regular routes might be preferable to using illicit routes, particularly if the network wants to save time or money. Figure 1 shows the routes available for different transnational activities under different levels of hostility.

When a terrorist group uses telecommunications along virtual routes, there is little meaningful distinction between legitimate and illicit use of what are for the most part lines of communication set up and encouraged by the state. However, in a hostile environment, where the state is attempting to monitor and crack down on a group’s communications, the group might take illicit measures to avoid detection, such as frequently changing cell phone SIM cards, using email inboxes as virtual dead drops and the like. This is in fact what *Jemaah Islamiyah* did in its Singapore plot.

Moving people around the world can be a part of either of the network’s transnational activities and can use any route, legitimate or illicit. In an open political environment, the network might behave in a way similar to a multinational corporation, with its leaders flying around the world on high-powered business trips. Under extremely hostile conditions, couriers, messengers, and the like allow the group to maintain its command and control network where telecommunications have been shut off or compromised, but this limits the network’s behavior in other ways.

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**FIGURE 1** Movements and Routes of Terrorist Networks.
Terrorist networks trying to stage violent attacks need to obtain and move material, such as guns or explosives, that is almost always contraband. As a result, even in a nonhostile environment, they cannot simply ship their needed materials without any subterfuge, be they weapons, explosives, or machine parts. No matter how hospitable the environment, the group likely has to make illicit use of legitimate routes or, faced with more hostility, use illicit routes. As the group’s most circumscribed activity, logistics and the movement of material will become useful in helping us see the difficulties that terrorist groups have to overcome to operate, even in a globalized world.

Geography and Outcomes

Under pressure from hostile states, the terrorist groups must fall back on geography to operate and as a result become more territorially constrained. The network finds itself increasingly dependent on geography and increasingly constrained in the face of state hostility because of one of the seeming paradoxes of globalization: the technologies, methods of transportation, and processes that are most liberated from territory are also the ones that have received the most attention from states, and thus, are the ones most subject to curtailment by state power, sometimes even nominal state power. Air travel allows travelers to move around the world most quickly, but airports and airplanes are also subject to concentrations of state scrutiny. The logistical miracles of modern shipping have greatly decreased the costs of moving goods, but for extremely long distances the ships tend to go through a few major ports, which are often in countries with high levels of state capacity, such as Singapore and Hong Hong. With an increase in state hostility, networks must “go to ground,” so to speak, and increasingly rely on methods and routes that are dissociated from the state. Hence, they are more dependent on geography and traditional transportation routes. Geography is a tricky concept, and what it means in the context of this article is the physical contours of the landscape, coasts, islands, mountains, plains, jungle, desert, and the transportation routes that move over them. Falling back on geography has slightly different implications when we talk about illicit use of legitimate routes versus the use of entirely illicit routes. The reason is that the primary means of physically moving around the world, independent of the contours of the landscape, is air travel, and groups have a difficult time getting operatives or materials on planes when the state has turned against them. Thus, the terrorist group will likely be relegated to using regular seaports, rail lines, or highways, all of which follow the contours of the seascape and landscape, when it crosses the border. The group might have a number of routes at its

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20 There are instances where a state may be actively aiding and abetting a terrorist group—Iran’s support of Hezbollah, for instance—but in those situations, the group is arguably no longer a nonstate actor.
disposal, particularly when it is crossing between two countries with a close economic relationship, but it does not have unlimited options.

For illicit routes, the network’s dependence on geography is even more important. Here we look for the presence of geographical advantages along the borders. Air travel is likely unavailable, so the group must move by land or sea. Since it is attempting to bypass the state’s border controls entirely, it cannot take standard roads, often must build up local contacts and provide its own vehicles, and it must find boats that either set off or land away from regular ferry or cargo ports. As a result, the group will most likely follow routes that are difficult for states to police due to the difficult terrain: chains of many small (and often uninhabited islands), treacherous mountains, nearly impenetrable jungle, blistering deserts, or some combination of the above. A lack of such geographic advantages would make it very difficult for the group to carry out its activities successfully.

Given the relationship between state hostility and dependence on geography, we would expect to see terrorist groups facing little hostility to jet around the world or travel around a region using legal means, and terrorist groups facing greater hostility to abandon air travel and use certain illegal sea and land routes that are defined by their geographical features. If a particular border is quite hostile, but does not provide any geographical advantages (such as the border between Singapore, and Malaysia and Indonesia), the terrorist group has a problem. As to where the terrorist group is trying to smuggle weapons or command followers, almost no terrorist groups are scattered randomly across the globe. Even in an age of globalization, there is a logic to illicit transnational flows. In the next section, I will examine this logic and the challenges faced by Jemaah Islamiyah as it planned two different attacks—one which succeeded, thanks in part to the tools of globalization, and one which failed, this time due to geography.


Although Jemaah Islamiyah had gone operational around 1995, and it had begun trying to smuggle weapons into Indonesia in 1997, it did not engage in any bombings until 1999. But when it did, it began with a vengeance, hitting the Manila Metro, the Philippine ambassador’s house in Jakarta, and in its most spectacular attack up to that point, thirty-eight different churches and Christian facilities in eleven different cities across Indonesia on Christmas Eve 2000.

Jemaah Islamiyah delivered bombs throughout central and western Indonesia, namely in Batam, Lombok, West Java (Ciamis, Jakarta, Bandung, ...

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Bekasi, Mojokerto, and Sukabumi), and northern Sumatra (Medan, Pekanbaru, and Pematang Siantar). The bombings were not really successful in terms of mass casualties, or competent bomb making or delivery: the bombs killed “only” nineteen people and wounded 120. Many of the bombs failed to go off, and some of the bombers also died through careless accidents, including Abu Jabir, the leader of the Bandung plot, who died when someone called his cell phone, which was wired to one of the bombs he was carrying.22 The bombings were an astonishing success in terms of coordination: they all went off within 90 minutes of each other, and in fact an operation of that scope was something that JI would not pull off again. The operation’s territorial spread was vast. Although all of the bombs were in Indonesia, much of the planning was done in Kuala Lumpur, and the explosives came from the Philippines. The governments of Southeast Asia had no idea that JI existed, and the fall of Suharto had opened up the way for JI to spread unimpeded back into Indonesia. As a result, the operation was JI at its freest; the plotters were surprisingly brazen in much of the planning and execution. This section will concentrate on the planning that went into the attack on one location, Batam, the island in Indonesia immediately across from Singapore.

Preparation for the attacks began several months beforehand with frugal investigative trips. In August 2000, JI members Imam Samudra and Syahid Jabir took a long-distance ferry from Jakarta to Batam, landing at Sekupang. The entire trip was done cheaply (Imam Samudra looked for a room that would go for 25,000 Indonesian rupiah/night (about US$3)) and quickly. They stayed in Batam for only two days and used the time to develop a familiarity with the island, as well as get a (presumably fake) passport for 700,000 rupiah.23

Jemaah Islamiyah at this period in its history was a bureaucratic organization that cherished planning meetings, and it held them whenever and wherever it could. This required extensive traveling. At the beginning of September 2000, JI members Hambali, Mukhlas, and Zulkifli bin Marzuki met in Kuala Lumpur, where it was decided to put into action the earlier resolution of the Rabitatul Mujahidin (Southeast Asia’s umbrella Islamic terrorist forum), which expressed support for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front’s activities against the Philippine government by attacking the Philippine embassy in

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23 Berita Acara Pemeriksaan (Tersangka) Abdul Azis Bin Sihabudin al. Abu Umar al. Imam Samudra al. Fais Yunshar Heri al. Hendri al. Kudama,” (Batam: Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia, Daerah Riau, Kota Besar Barelang, 27 November 2002). This interrogation report was published by the Indonesian National Police, specifically the Kota Besar Barelang police department, which is based on the island of Batam in the province of Riau Islands. All of the names listed in the title of each Indonesian document are the aliases for a single suspect. The abbreviation “al.” stands for “alias” in Indonesian.
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Jakarta with explosives provided by JI operative Fathur Rahman al Ghozi from the Philippines itself. The next month, Hambali, Mukhlas, Dr. Azhari, and others met in Kuala Lumpur, and in addition to the Philippine embassy attack made plans to attack churches in Indonesia, as well as American military interests in Singapore. Hambali ordered his associate Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana to go to Solo to ask JI amir Abu Bakar Ba’asyir for permission to carry out the attacks. At the end of October 2000, Imam Samudra took the same boat as before from Jakarta to Batam, but this time, after tarrying in a more expensive hotel, he took another ferry to Malaysia from Batu Ampar, Batam, using a passport under the name Abdul Azis (which is apparently his real name). He was not worried about being caught.

The final meeting of the Rabitatul Mujahidin took place at the beginning of November 2000 at a resort in the Malaysian state of Perak, according to JI operative Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana. The plans drawn up earlier by the group in Kuala Lumpur were approved. Later that month, Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana, Hambali, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, and Zulkifli Marzuki met at a hotel in Solo where they planned out more details of the Christmas Eve church bombings and attacks on American military interests in Singapore, especially at Sembawang (that is, the Yishun train station). After the meeting and lunch, Faiz returned to Kuala Lumpur, and Hambali went to Jakarta.

Getting the bomb materials required a great deal of planning. At the November Rabitatul Mujahidin meeting, the JI leadership decided to get the necessary explosives for the bombings from Mindanao and to transport them by boat, for which they allocated 15,000 Malaysian ringgit (about US$4,000) in addition to the money for the explosives themselves. Later in November, Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana, Hambali, Imam Samudra, Zulkifli Marzuki, and Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, most of the top operational people in JI, met in Solo for another planning meeting for not only the Christmas Eve bombings but also for the Singapore operations. If they could get away with it, JI was clearly intent on remaining active in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore all at the same time. It is unclear whether this was the same meeting where Suara Pembaruan, the Indonesian newspaper, claims that

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24 “Berita Acara Pemeriksaan Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana,” (Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia Korps Reserse Polri, 22 October 2002). This document was published by the research division of the Indonesian National Police. The Rabitatul Mujahidin was conceived by JI amir Abu Bakar Ba’asyir as an umbrella organization of Islamic terrorist groups in Southeast Asia and met three times before events precluded its continued existence.
25 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
Faiz, Hambali, Imam Samudra, and Dr. Azhari met to discuss the bombings, but after this meeting Hambali and others were dispatched to procure the explosives. Hambali and his fellow operative, Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana, bought the explosives in Manila from unknown suppliers for some significant portion of 180,000 Malaysian ringgit (about US$47,000). This was probably quite a significant amount of money for JI, but for almost 40 bombs in eleven cities spread over a number of provinces in Indonesia, it cost little. By this time, JI had its own boat for moving weapons and recruits back and forth between Indonesia and the Philippines through the Sangihe-Talaud islands, so it is possible, even probable, that this boat brought the explosives into Indonesia.

The lack of official scrutiny in any country meant that the planners and bombers could move around Southeast Asia at little cost, with minimal concealment, and maintain personal control over each bombing. The leader of the cell in each city seems to have planned everything down to the bombs and personnel, leaving only the specific locations up to the foot soldiers. While JI was certainly capable of using electronic communications (Hambali and Imam Samudra in particular talked many times on their cell phones before the bombings), they still preferred to meet in safe locations with a JI presence (such as in Solo, Jakarta, and Kuala Lumpur), and this required a great deal of travel. According to a Suara Pembaruan source, JI allocated 195,000 ringgit (about US$6000) for travel expenses alone. If Imam Samudra’s presence at all these meetings is correct, then in the space of three months he traveled to Jakarta, Solo, Kuala Lumpur several times, and finally to Batam, where he was in charge of the Batam bombs. Likewise Hambali was in Kuala Lumpur, Solo, Jakarta, Manila and/or Mindanao, Kuala Lumpur, and eventually went back to Jakarta, where he was in charge of the West Java bombs. Figure 2 shows the travel chokepoints and locations of planning meetings, and how the planners moved from place to place. The only locations that are geographically adjacent to each other are Singapore, Batam, and Johor. Without any outside pressure, Jemaah Islamiyah was comfortable using nearly its full territorial extent at the time to plan operations. Furthermore, the routes are similar to what one might imagine a small company with a limited budget using: direct plane trips to important meetings for the longer, nonadjacent routes, with a combination of much cheaper buses and ferries for the lower-level people (such as Imam Samudra) with more time.

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29 “JI Biayai Bom di Malam Natal,” Suara Pembaruan, 29 October 2002. It would not be surprising if there were at least two meetings, since JI loved meetings, and it generally had separate meetings to discuss overall planning and then specific operational details.

30 Ibid.

31 Sardjono was a fisherman who helped JI smuggle weapons and people between Indonesia and the Philippines. See International Crisis Group, “Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia: Damaged but still Dangerous,” (Jakarta: International Crisis Group, 26 August 2003), 18–22.

on their hands, or for traveling shorter routes between close-by locations. In an open political environment, the technology of globalization is indeed quite helpful to terrorists: they can literally fly over international boundaries while making their plans.

While the high-level planners were calling meeting after meeting, the Batam plot began coming together. In the middle of November 2000, Imam Samudra returned to Batu Ampar, Batam from Johor, Malaysia, and then boarded a ship for Pekanbaru. After a night in Pekanbaru, he took a bus to Jakarta. A few weeks later, Imam Samudra took the same ship from Jakarta to Batam yet again, this time to settle in for the major part of the operation. He soon met up with a \textit{Jemaah Islamiyah} member who was already living in Batam, Iqbal alias Basuki alias Mahmud (he was apparently one of the few \textit{Jemaah Islamiyah} associates in Batam), who provided temporary places to stay in the months before the bombing and served as the fifth member of the Batam plot. Despite the availability of modern telecommunications, the plotters still sometimes preferred to meet in person for important discussions, just like multinational corporations.

\textit{Jemaah Islamiyah} seconded low-level members from nearby cells to help with each bombing. In the case of Batam, Ja‘afar bin Mistooki alias

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Furqoon traveled from Singapore to Batam with two other members of the regional command covering Singapore and Malaysia, Mantiqi I: Hashim bin Abas alias Syamsudin, and another Mantiqi I member known as Abdul Rahim alias Syamsudin. They came on the orders of Hambali to help Imam Samudra with the church bombings at the end of November 2000, and returned on 25 December 2000. Before going to Batam, the three Mantiqi I members took a side trip to Kuala Lumpur, where Hambali encouraged them by showing them a video of attacks on Muslims in Ambon.

After the Singaporeans arrived in Batam, Hambali called them via cell-phone and told them to find a house to rent, which they did after two days of looking, renting out a room using local JI connections in Happy Garden Block H, No. 3A, Kodya. The Singaporeans were assigned the task of leaving the house in the morning and returning in the evening as if they were going to work, so that they would not arouse the suspicions of the neighbors. While at their “jobs,” their assignment was to watch the movements of the police, survey the targeted churches, buy some components, such as suitcases and blenders, that would be needed to make the bombs, and help mix the bomb ingredients in the blenders. Imam Samudra gave the Singaporeans money for the components and took the receipts back to keep an accurate accounting of the money spent, an example of JI’s scrupulous bureaucracy.

The plotters received many visitors. In the middle of December, Mukhlas, who was a high-level Mantiqi I official, flew into Batam, was picked up from the airport by Hashim, and gave a blessing to the plotters at the request of Imam Samudra before leaving after a day for Johor via ferry. After they had been in Batam for three weeks, Hambali himself came and stayed in a hotel while he conferred about the now imminent attacks on local churches. He also made an inspection of the safe house where the bombs

35 Jemaah Islamiyah, being a hierarchical paramilitary organization, was divided at the time into regional commands, called mantiqi. Mantiqi I covered Singapore and Malaysia, and Mantiqi II covered all of Indonesia. Later on, JI created Mantiqi III, which handled eastern Indonesia and the Philippines, and Mantiqi IV, which was based in Australia. Since all the detainees call each other by different aliases, it is extremely difficult to figure out who used what alias when. Imam Samudra referred to a Syamsudin who was at the house with him, but never used the name Abdul Rahim, while both Hashim and Ja’afar used Abdul Rahim only; so it is likely that Abdul Rahim and Syamsudin are one and the same, since there were only five people in the house in Batam.

36 “Surat Pernyataan Ja’afar bin Mistooki,” letter sent from Batam (Singapore: Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia, 4 September 2002). Ja’afar bin Mistooki was detained by the Singaporean government in January 2002. This document is a letter, translated into Indonesian, sent from the Singaporean government to the Indonesian National Police with Ja’afar’s responses to the Indonesian government’s questions about the Batam bombing plot.

37 Ibid. The idea was that JI was attacking churches and Christian leaders who were involved in supplying Christian forces in the Maluku conflict.

38 Ibid.

39 “Berita Acara Pemeriksaan Ali Ghufron als.. Mukhlas,” (Denpasar: Kepolisian Daerah Bali (Direktorat Reserse), 29 December 2002). This document was published by Research Directorate of the Bali police, based in Denpasar.
Hambali’s trip to Batam was not to bring money for the operation but to motivate the troops, as he had done in Kuala Lumpur. Dr. Azhari bin Husin also came to Happy Garden in the weeks leading up to the bombings armed with computerized pictures and charts showing how to build a bomb and taught Imam Samudra much of what he needed to know, although Imam Samudra had previous training in Afghanistan.

Abu Jabir, the JI member in charge of supplies for the operation, sent an associate known as Tarmizi from Jakarta to Batam with a certain amount of TNT, two boxes of magnesium nitrate, detonators, and batteries. The other ingredients, notably potassium chlorate, sulfur, bolts, wires, and the other components, were bought in Batam itself. Mahmud and Ja’afar then picked Abu Jabir’s package up in Sekupang. The Singaporeans mixed the ingredients, while Imam Samudra actually put the bombs together. It took Imam Samudra three days to make five bombs in the house at Happy Garden. They then wrapped the bombs to look like Christmas gifts and put them into suitcases. All of the plotters dropped the bombs off at their designated churches and set the timers so that they would go off at 8:55 pm on Christmas Eve (which they did) and returned to Happy Garden by 11:00 pm.

The day after the bombing, the Singaporeans returned to Singapore directly and later met in Penang, Malaysia, with Imam Samudra. Ja’afar bin Mistooki went from Singapore to the house of Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana in Malaysia after the bombing for a wrap-up evaluation session attended by Mukhlas, Hambali, Imam Samudra, and several Malaysians. The other bombing operations went off in virtually identical ways: Hambali and other high-level JI officials would stop by to oversee preparations personally, give instructions, and provide motivation, while local or nearby JI operatives would carry out the bombings in each city.

The Christmas Eve 2000 bombings are a classic case of a sophisticated, coordinated operation over fairly large distances. But JI’s moment of triumph also displayed the weakness of its operational model: it was only capable of...
working if no one was paying attention. The planning process for the bombings was characterized by numerous meetings in cities throughout Malaysia and Indonesia, with a TNT logistics network that extended from the Philippines through eastern Indonesia to Java and back north to Medan and Batam. The primary planners, particularly Dr. Azhari, Hambali, and Imam Samudra traveled constantly, using a number of different types of transport. Every time they crossed a border and held a meeting, they would have put themselves in increased danger of being detected if the relevant governments had been looking for them. In an indication of the easy political climate (or his lax operational security), Imam Samudra took the same boat to and from Batam at least three times and entered Malaysia using his real name. This travel was not because they were on the run. By comparison, in later bombings, such as the attack on the Marriott in 2003, the plotters were constantly traveling but they moved across much smaller swatches of territory and were more cautious.50

The bombings also illustrate that making a competent timed bomb is not as easy as it might appear in a country that has even minimal control over its territory. Many of the components of the bombs, particularly the TNT, could not be found in Batam and had to be brought from Jakarta or from the Philippines via a circuitous route that took advantage of the geographical features of the Philippines/Indonesia border (or more specifically the traditional trading routes that use the same features). In addition, the Batam operation was dependent on one bomb maker, Imam Samudra. Although Ja’afar had also had a fair amount of training, it is unclear if he was capable of making sophisticated bombs, and even Imam Samudra needed the personal help of Dr. Azhari, JI’s master bomb maker. If the plotters had not been able to travel extensively, if there had been a more restricted supply of bomb makers, and if the suppliers had not felt it politically feasible to transport illicit materials halfway across Southeast Asia, the Batam bombing operation would have been significantly impaired. Jemaah Islamiah certainly took advantage of the tools of globalization in the Christmas Eve 2000 bombings: the ease of travel and communications across Southeast Asia worked to their advantage, but the continuing importance of face-to-face contact, the low-level means of travel (by bus and ferry), and the lengths to which JI went to get supplies suggests a vulnerability that globalization was not able to remedy, and an opportunity for states to crack down.

FAILURE: SINGAPORE PLOTS (2001)

By comparison, the failed Singapore bombing plots of 2001, involving a number of the same people as the Batam plot, illustrate the infuriating difficulty

(to terrorists) of operating across international boundaries in a geographically disadvantageous, politically hostile environment. JI’s plans for attacking the Singaporean targets were among the first specific bombings conceived by members of the organization, in the mid-1990s. For several years, it seems they were the centerpiece of JI’s future plans for terror. Khalim Jaffar, a Singaporean wakalah member, first thought about attacking the Yishun Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station (specifically the shuttle bus that took American service members to Sembawang Naval Base from Yishun) in 1997 when JI Singapore went operational and was deemed ready to take part in terrorist attacks. In 1999, he and accomplices took video of the station from a public housing complex across the street under the guise of filming one of the accomplice’s daughters. They were going to put the bomb in the baskets of bicycles that were parked near the station. Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana took the tape to Afghanistan in 1999, and JI Singapore briefed al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan (which is why the Yishun MRT video was discovered in the ruins of Mohammed Atef’s house). Al Qaeda was interested. The attack plans were also approved by Jemaah Islamiyah’s military council and supervised by Hambali himself. Yet even though they were the longest-running plans JI had, they were never carried out. One could argue that their failure was due to the breakup of the cell by the Singaporean and Malaysian police, but the plans had already been in gestation for approximately four years before that. Why had they not moved on them? The answer is that the major limiting factor on the attacks was the logistical problem of actually getting the bombers and bomb materials into place.

The political environment in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, one of ignorance or benign neglect, was not going to get any better, and the theory suggests that JI’s command and control structure would have little need for geographical advantages of borders as it crossed them. In concrete terms, this is what happened in both plots. As for logistics, the importance of geography basically meant that JI had to find a chain of adjacent countries through which to smuggle its explosives along illicit routes (or by making illicit use of legitimate routes) from the source to the destination. Fortunately, from the view of JI, the Batam bombings required smuggling the weapons only from the Philippines to Indonesia and then through Indonesia. This was done without too much trouble, although it was not trivial. But when trying to get explosives into Singapore, Jemaah Islamiyah encountered a government that was virulently hostile to smuggling in any form, even if it did not know that a terrorist group was behind the smuggling. This increased JI’s dependence on geographic features when crossing Singapore’s borders. But

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51 Singaporean internal security officials, interviewed by Justin Hastings in Singapore, November 2005.
the tiny island city-state provided none that JI could easily use, rendering it logistically impotent.

The Singapore wakalah, equivalent to a brigade in JI’s hierarchy, was either in existence at the formal creation of Jemaah Islamiyah on 1 January 1993, or it was set up soon afterward by Ibrahim Maidin, its first leader, known for his discipline and secrecy (and apparently magnetic effect over his subordinates). From the early 1990s, the Singaporean government knew of some of JI’s members, but did not necessarily know they were involved in Jemaah Islamiyah, a situation similar to that in Malaysia. Jemaah Islamiyah was never a registered society—neither the operations nor the dakwah groups can legally exist in Singapore—which meant JI also faced a low hum of hostility and, as a result, took moderate security measures when within the country. Aside from the Yishun MRT station, JI conducted several casings of Americans’ houses, and on the family camping trips, they would charter buses to drive the entire group around. One member would have a camera and pretend to tape a friend or a child along on the trip in order to get video of the intended target. Jemaah Islamiyah also maintained electronic operational security, which would be akin to making illicit use of legitimate ‘virtual routes.’ During their planning, JI members would use a single anonymous email account and save emails to be read by everyone in the draft box. No messages were sent, so none could be intercepted. They also put their shoes inside the flats during meetings so as not to arouse the suspicion of the neighbors and held the special operational classes only after regular Quran study groups had adjourned for the night.

After the Singapore cell went operational, two plans reached the stage where cell members started worrying about procuring bombers and explosives: a series of simultaneous truck bombs against foreign interests, (especially the United States, Australian, and British embassies), and the attack on the Yishun MRT station. JI’s operational leadership apparently first planned to attack the United States and Israeli embassies in a meeting in September 2001, after al Qaeda’s 9/11 terrorist attacks. They set a target date of either December 2001, or April or May 2002, and calculated that they would need 21 tons of ammonium nitrate. Information on the planned truck bomb attacks was initially confined to four members of Fiah Musa, directed by Hambali and Sammy. The leadership had Mohammed Mansour Jabarah alias Sammy, a Canadian-Arab, travel from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore in October to

53 Singaporean internal security officials, interview, November 2005.
55 Dakwah is roughly equivalent to proselytization.
56 Singaporean internal security officials, interview, November 2005.
57 Ibid.
58 A fiah was the standard terrorist cell of JI, consisting of perhaps 4 to 8 members.
59 Singaporean internal security officials, interview, November 2005.
inform the Singapore cell of their plans against the U.S. embassy, the Israeli
embassy, and U.S. naval forces in Singapore. The Singapore cell members
added the British embassy and the Australian embassy, and conducted video
reconnaissance, both together with Sammy and on their own.60

The actual suicide bombers for the attacks were to be supplied by al
Qaeda, presumably from outside of Southeast Asia, since it before Bali had
no suicide bombers of its own (nor, in fact, did any Southeast Asian terrorist
group),61 but it was originally its role to handle the planning and other
logistics. The Singaporean members of were deemed not ready for suicide
bombing, although some of the Singaporean members did later express a
willingness to be suicide bombers upon interrogation.62

This is when the logistics of actually staging violent attacks in a tightly
controlled state like Singapore became an issue. According to the investiga-
tions of the Internal Security Department, the plotters never managed to get
explosives into Singapore.63 There are only three ways into Singapore: by air
through Changi Airport (which was always off-limits to ), by sea from Johor,
Malaysia or Batam, Indonesia, and by land across the causeway (or more re-
cently the Second Link at Tuas). The two different sea borders encourage
different kinds of smuggling methods. The narrow strait between Johor and
Singapore can be crossed within sixty seconds by a speedboat, but such a
small, swift boat can only handle a small load on each trip, rendering it unsuit-
able for safe passage of tons of anything. The more expansive waters between
Batam and Singapore are more suitable for larger, slower, and stealthier boats
that try to slip between Singaporean patrols, and this seems to be the option
considered most seriously.64 Since they already had plans to stage attacks in
Singapore (specifically the Yishun MRT station), at the same time as they were
planning the Christmas Eve bombings in the latter half of 2000, the leadership (specifically Imam Samudra and/or Mukhlas) asked Hashim Abbas to
observe the immigration post in Batam, with the goal of smuggling explosives
into Singapore. Hashim Abbas duly took a ferry from Tanjung Putri in Johor,
Malaysia to Batu Ampar in Batam, in order to see if it was possible to smug-
gle up to 10 tons of TNT, C4, or C5 into Malaysia or Singapore from Batam,
although he was at a loss as to where all this explosive would come from.65
Nothing came of it, and apparently at a dead end by sea, returned to land.

61 This initial lack of suicide bombers is an interesting data point for such articles as Scott Atran,
47 and Martha Crenshaw, “Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay,” Security Studies 16, no. 1
(January–March 2007): 133–62, which reviews most of the recent literature on suicide terrorism.
62 Singaporean internal security officials, interview, November 2005; and Singaporean external intel-
ligence officials, interviewed by Justin Hastings in Singapore, October 2005.
63 Singaporean internal security officials, interview, November 2005.
64 Singaporean police official, interviewed by Justin Hastings in Singapore, July 2005.
65 “Surat Pernyataan Hashim bin Abbas,” (Singapore: Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia, 30
March 2002).
The general bombing plans involved explosives from two sources: conventional TNT and ammonium nitrate, which presented their own acquisition challenges. *Jemaah Islamiyah* does not seem to have ever had any hope of buying TNT in Singapore itself, and it tried mightily to get foreign-bought ammonium nitrate into Singapore before resorting to a domestic supplier, which aroused the suspicion of Singaporean officials.

Others in *JI* got closer to working out plans for smuggling the Singapore explosives. At the beginning of July 2001, Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana and Arkam, based in Kuala Lumpur, took a plane to Solo through Batam and Jakarta for the purposes of scouting out the route by which they would move the explosives intended for the Singapore attacks. The TNT would apparently be bought in General Santos City in the Philippines, then transported by ship to Manado in eastern Indonesia, on to Surabaya in Java, and finally Batam, where they would find some way to get it into Singapore. In Solo, there was another round of meetings at *JI* headquarters, after which Faiz flew back to Kuala Lumpur from Surabaya and briefed Mukhlas (now head of Mantiqi I) on the plots.66

In the fall of 2001, in his role as the plot’s non-Singaporean logistician, Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana met with Fathur Rahman al Ghozi in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, and told him to buy five to seven tons’ worth of explosives in the Philippines for use in Singapore. Al Ghozi subsequently ordered six tons of TNT from his supplier Hussein Ramos in Cebu starting in November 2001. This is not unthinkable. Workers can easily pilfer detonators, a few kilograms of TNT, a length of detonating cords, and other materials for bombs from a mine over time by purposefully over-reporting how much they have used and taking the difference for themselves, although the large amount of TNT suggests a sophisticated operation. After the wave of *JI* arrests in Singapore, with the plan still in operation in late December 2001, al Ghozi apparently took possession of only 1,100 kg because he did not have enough money for the rest (Al Ghozi’s trip to Bangkok, for which he was about to leave when he was arrested, was not only for the *JI* meeting scheduled there in January 2002, but also to get the rest of the money for the TNT from the *JI* leadership). The new plan was for al Ghozi to move the explosives into Singapore by shipping it from the Philippines to Manado, in

66 “Berita Acara Pemeriksaan Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana,” 22 October 2002. Two plans were hatched at the meeting (aside from the Singapore plots). One group, to be composed of people from Mantiqi I, was supposed to kill then-Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri, while the other was supposed to implement a plan to kill Catholic priests who were meeting in Manado. Faiz told Mukhlas about the Megawati assassination plan. Mukhlas responded that there was no way Mantiqi I had the people to plan and carry out such a plot, and Mantiqi II would have to do it. Since Mantiqi II did not do it, this is apparently why the assassination plan fizzled out.


68 Singaporean external intelligence officials, interview, October 2005.

Indonesia, thence to Malaysia, and finally over the causeway between Johor Bahru, Malaysia and Singapore. This differed from the original plan in that the explosives would go through Malaysia, but was no more successful than the plan to bring the explosives through Batam.

Figure 3 shows both of the planned smuggling routes that JI had mapped out for getting explosives into Singapore. The first plan was very similar to the route that had been used in the Christmas Eve 2000 bombings and probably would have worked to get the explosives to Batam, at least. It is unclear from the second plan how JI was going to get the explosives from Manado to Johor Bahru. A ship is the most likely possibility, one that would not necessarily take a direct path between the two cities, but probably stop somewhere in Sabah, in Malaysia. Manado is the key chokepoint in both plans, and for good reason. Terrorist groups’ logistics are almost always more difficult than command and control—governments that do not care about seemingly harmless meetings care more about weapons smuggling, so it would be fair to say that weapons smuggling almost never encounters a truly nonhostile environment. As a result, a city with advantageous geography and an established network is especially valuable. Latent hostility encouraged JI’s smugglers to be cautious, and they almost exclusively used the two waterways between the Philippines and Indonesia (the Sangihe-Talaud Islands) and between the Philippines and Malaysia (the area around Palawan), both of which are laced

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70 Singaporean external intelligence officials, interview, October 2005.
with tiny islands ideal for hiding boats and illicit goods. Chokepoints, even for illicit networks, are sticky. Manado is the first major city in Indonesia for boats illegally plying the waters between the Philippines and Indonesia and is convenient for getting to the rest of the country. Although the province is mostly Christian, it contained a **Jemaah Islamiyah** safehouse and was one of JI’s transit points for recruits going to the Philippines for training and coming from the Philippines with weapons, stretching back to before Suharto fell in 1998. None of the region’s governments knew it at the time, but cracking down on smuggling through Manado in 2000–01 might have stymied Jemaah Islamiyah’s plots before they ever got to Singapore or western Indonesia.\(^{71}\)

Ammonium nitrate was easier for the plotters to get, but presented its own problems. The embassy bombing plan, which was introduced to the Singapore JI members by Sammy, was to acquire six trucks, build giant ammonium nitrate (more than 3 tons each) bombs in them, and leave each for the suicide bomber to pick up at a location near the target. JI had already acquired four tons of ammonium nitrate locally in Malaysia, and a man known only as “Sabah” was holding it there.\(^{72}\)

**Jemaah Islamiyah** planned to smuggle both the TNT and the ammonium nitrate across the causeway into Singapore, making illicit use of a legitimate route. But how? The plotters considered putting the ammonium nitrate in big barrels, camouflaged among (possibly) cosmetic boxes. When the Singaporean government cracked down, they had not yet gotten the trucks, the necessary chemicals, or the detonating cords.\(^{73}\) But bringing almost twenty tons of ammonium nitrate into Singapore over the causeway was no simple matter. Conventional explosives (TNT) remain stable for years and can be stored for a long time. On the other hand, ammonium nitrate degrades to the point where it is unusable relatively quickly. If the Singaporean bombers wanted to use ammonium nitrate in their truck bombs, they would have had to bring in large amounts each time. Bringing in small amounts in multiple shipments would have been more secure but would have taken more time, and the first shipments would have degraded by the time the last shipments arrived.\(^{74}\) Aside from the degradation, each trip across the causeway increased the chance that the plotters would be caught.

Stymied by the problem of getting Malaysian (or Filipino) explosives into Singapore, Sammy ordered one of the Singaporean cell members, Ellias, to find warehouse space in Singapore for building the bombs and to acquire 17 tons of ammonium nitrate in Singapore. But both projects were unsuccessful.

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72 Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror*, 137–38; and Ministry of Home Affairs, “The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism,” 27. The report claims that the ammonium nitrate was shipped to Batam, but in fact it was later found buried in a plantation in Malaysia.

73 Singaporean internal security officials, interview, November 2005.

74 Singaporean external intelligence officials, interview, October 2005.
They had a problem finding someone to receive the explosives and store them, and were looking for a warehouse to store the explosives and trucks when the crackdown came. Ellias duly talked to a friend of his who knew of a company that would sell him ammonium nitrate. The company manager told Ellias to come in person to arrange the order, but Ellias was arrested before he could do so. A Singaporean informant notes that there are only three or four sources of ammonium nitrate in Singapore, and while they were regulated before 9/11 and this incident, access to ammonium nitrate is especially restricted now. With the wave of arrests, the four tons of ammonium nitrate that JI had obtained were missing, causing Malaysian and Singaporean officials no small amount of heartburn looking for it. It turned up in early 2003 buried at a rubber plantation in Malaysia, but had degraded to the point where it was not very usable as explosives, just as JI had presumably feared.

In an indication of the open political environment that existed outside of Singapore, the planning aspects of the Singapore plots were in some sense even more geographically widespread than the Batam plots. Al Qaeda in Afghanistan was briefed on some of the Singapore plans, which included operatives coming down from Kuala Lumpur, operatives going up to Johor Bahru, explosives-buying in the Philippines, and a planned meeting in Bangkok. The Arab suicide bombers to be provided by Al Qaeda would fly in the day before the embassy bombings and proceed to their destinations, indicating that they were coming from somewhere far from Singapore, probably the Middle East. But geography and politics got in the way of JI’s machinations. Although JI had plans to attack targets in Singapore from at least 1997 on and had conducted reconnaissance on all the targets, it was consistently presented with the problem of how to transport explosives from a country with a lax environment to a more weapons-hostile environment and finally to a supremely weapons-hostile environment, a problem it never overcame. Singapore, being a small island city-state with a high level of state capacity, might be significantly more difficult for a terrorist group to penetrate than a larger, weak country such as Indonesia. This is true, and to a certain extent I chose the Singapore plots were chosen as a comparative case because the island’s geography provides clear smuggling routes that can be analyzed easily. Yet dependence on geography for less than legitimate routes still holds for other parts of JI’s activities. While JI found it easier to move explosives and people from the Philippines to Indonesia, it had to set up its own smuggling cell, use its own boat, and depend on the many small islands separating the two countries to evade authorities. The operation was by no means trivial.

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75 Singaporean internal security officials, interview, November 2005.
77 Singaporean external intelligence officials, interview, October 2005.
78 Ibid.
80 Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for this comment.
IT IS NOT AS EASY AS IT LOOKS

Successfully engaging in one transnational activity is not easy for a terrorist group, even in the best of circumstances. Both plots took place before 9/11, and the world has changed a great deal since then, but it has arguably become more difficult for terrorist groups, and certainly for Jemaah Islamiyah, to move around. The security crackdown in air travel means that the extensive travels of the JI planners in 2000 or the intercontinental movements of the people involved in al Qaeda’s 9/11 plot are unlikely to be replicated. Simultaneously holding planning meetings in more than one country, buying and shipping bomb ingredients, and moving the people and the goods to the right locations, all against one or more hostile governments are even more difficult, and it is little wonder that the violent faction of Jemaah Islamiyah has appeared to be operating on a once-a-year bombing schedule since 2002. In the two cases outlined in this article, JI faced varying political and geographic conditions as it tried to stage attacks first across Indonesia, then in Singapore, and the structure of each plot shifted as a result, not always successfully. Whenever it had the political openness to do so, JI behaved much like a small, multinational corporation and benefited from globalization: cheap plane trips, cell phone calls, email, and generally lenient border controls. When increased hostility forced it to act more like the clandestine group that it was, the technologies of globalization proved less helpful, and JI had to fall back on geographic advantages, if any.

I have looked at Jemaah Islamiyah primarily as a way to understand how transnational terrorist networks operate under conditions of globalization. The theory laid out in this article does not give us any insight into why terrorist groups choose one target over another in a given country, for example, and the theory says nothing about why terrorist groups come into existence. Examining two plots from one terrorist network leads to understandably limited conclusions. As for how widespread transnational attacks are, it is possible, even probable, that there are few terrorist networks in the world capable of operating across international boundaries in their plots, although the groups of greatest concern to U.S. policy makers, such as al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah itself, would appear to fall into this category. If this is true, the relative lack of transnational terrorist plots is in itself interesting. The experiences of Jemaah Islamiyah indicate that transnational activities, particularly logistics, are difficult to carry out successfully, and fears of globalized terrorist networks might be a bit overblown. It may be that bombing plots are especially difficult, and it would be unsurprising if under significant pressure groups opt for less spectacular but logistically simpler operations.

81 Although he was not an accomplice to any of the attacks, Nasir Abas in his book provides an interesting inside view of Jemaah Islamiyah in the time following the initial crackdowns. See Nasir Abas, Membongkar Jamaah Islamiyah: Pengakuan Mantan Anggota JI (Jakarta: Grafindo, 2005).
The irony of JI’s failure in Singapore is that it is possible to smuggle illicit goods into the country, given proper use of geographical advantages, but not in the quantities JI wanted. Had the planners limited their ambitions and aimed for a much smaller bomb that could be smuggled in one try across the causeway, they would have stood a greater chance of success and could still have made a significant political point, given Singapore’s vaunted impenetrability.

Modern telecommunications enable terrorists to move along “virtual routes,” but as we have seen, this is of limited use when trying to stage a violent physical attack. With global communications, transnational terrorism-friendly social movements, such as the Islamic fundamentalist movement from which sprung al Qaeda, are certainly still dangerous—their virtual products, such as diffusion of ideas or propaganda, can be just as harmful as actual attacks. But should people within those movements decide to stage an attack, they still must form a network that becomes beholden to geography and other pressures. Given the conclusions of this article, it is unsurprising that under pressure al Qaeda has become something more akin to a social movement, with regional Islamists, such as the perpetrators of the 11 March 2004 bombings in Madrid, who were inspired by al Qaeda, but had questionable operational ties.

While modern technology, capital flows, and quick and efficient means of transportation allow terrorist groups to spread out their command and control and to organize multiple simultaneous attacks in different parts of a country (or even in different countries), they do so subject to restrictions that are not ameliorated by the technologies of globalization. Terrorist groups are most able to take advantage of globalization when their political environment is closest to that experienced by legitimate transnational actors. When they face a hostile political environment, inasmuch as the most modern communications and transport depend on infrastructure built and controlled by states, the technologies of globalization are less available to them, particularly for logistics, and they must stick to the landscape with all the constraints that entails.

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82 Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for this point.