

**ABSTRACT**

In April 2010 the ICG published a report entitled ‘Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh’ (International Crisis Group, Asia Report No 189 – 20 April 2010) which analysed the recent discovery of an Islamist terrorist cell in the province of Aceh, Indonesia. The dismantling of this group by the Indonesian authorities was followed by further arrests elsewhere in Indonesia, including that of the infamous Abu Bakar Bashir, who is alleged to have helped set up the Aceh group. As the report outlined, the discovery of this group’s existence was quite unexpected: because firstly it indicated another ‘mutation in Indonesian jihadi ranks’, one which involved a novel strategic approach; secondly because it was led by the notorious terrorist fugitive Dulmatin; and thirdly because the group chose Aceh as its theatre of operations. The last of these elements was especially surprising because most observers would have rated such a group’s chances of success in this locale as particularly slim due to local antipathy (as it proved). For somewhat different reasons the emergence of Islamist terror in Indonesia itself in the early 2000s came as an even greater surprise.

Certainly it was a shock to American, Australian and Indonesian intelligence agencies and their governments alike. It was equally surprising for Indonesianists such as myself for whom, perhaps naively, Indonesia did not seem fertile ground for such a movement. Not so much because Indonesia had just become a democracy after forty years of authoritarian rule, but primarily because our dominant paradigm was one in which Indonesia was perceived as a “moderate” Muslim country famous for its plural forms of Islamic practice and with a fairly settled “secular” political system. Moreover Muslims were seen as the driving force for democracy in Indonesia and political violence in the name of Islam, we believed, had long ceased to exist except where it was constructed by agents of the former regime for their own Machiavellian purposes. It seems we were all wrong and a massive effort has ensued since 2002 to understand and defeat the movement dubbed as Jemaah Islamiyah or JI. In this workshop I want to look at the current state of the ‘JI’ movement and to trace its origins. But my particular focus is on the question of why its emergence was apparently such a surprise.

**SPEAKER**

Dr Steven Drakeley is a senior lecturer in Asian and Islamic Studies in the School of Humanities and Languages at UWS, and a school-based member of the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies. He is a historian who specialises in the political history of post-independence Indonesia. His particular focus is on Islam in Indonesian politics, which is the title of the book he is currently writing, which deals primarily with the 1960s and 1970s. His published works include: “Bung Karno and the Bintang Muhammadiyah: A Political Affair”, *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 11, 1 (June 2009) 199-212; “Lubang Buaya: Myth, Misogyny and Massacre”, *Nebula* 4.4, December 2007; “In Search of Achmad Sukarno”, Vickers, Adrian, and Margaret Hanlon (eds). 2006. *Asia Reconstructed: Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference of the ASAA, 2006, Wollongong, Australia*. Canberra: Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) Inc. & Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS), The Australian National University. ISBN 978-0-9580837-3-7. [coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial conference/2006/proceedings.html] and *The History of Indonesia*, Greenwood Press, Westport Connecticut and London, 2005.

If you are planning to attend, please RSVP to [E.Garcia@uws.edu.au](mailto:E.Garcia@uws.edu.au) by Friday 10 September.