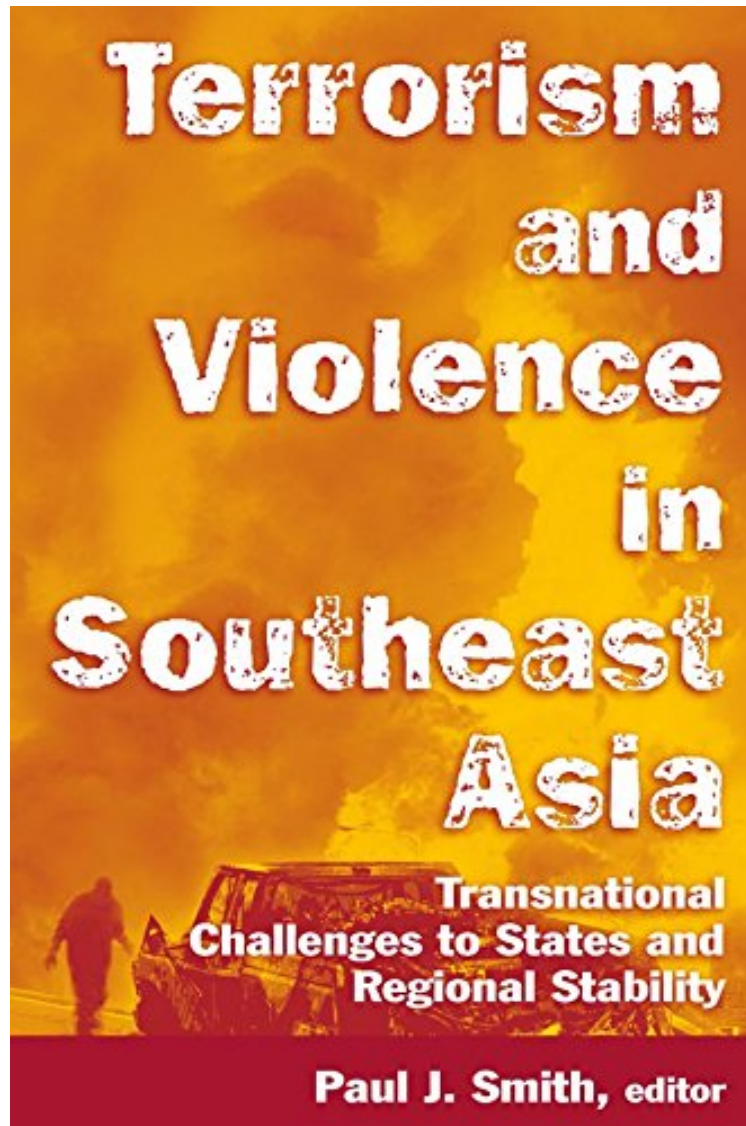


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# **Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia: Transnational Challenges to States and Regional Stability: Transnational Challenges to States and Regional Stability**

*Paul J. Smith*

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy YennyI like the narration in this book7 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Academia Abducted by Flying SourcesBy durianaddictAsia TimesMay 10, 2005Academia Abducted by Flying SourcesTerrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia, Transnational Challengesto States and Regional Stability edited by Paul J SmithReviewed by Allen QuickeThe threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia is dire, we are frequently assured,and as the title of this book implies. Various al-Qaeda-franchised terroristgroups in the region are helping al-Qaeda wage global jihad, as well asworking together to create a caliphate that will stretch across Southeast Asia fromthe Philippines to southern Thailand.So we should be mightily relieved that the region's two terrorist kingpinsare now behind bars. First Hambali (real name, Riduan Isamuddin) was caught inThailand in August 2003. Hambali was a kingpin all right. He was al-Qaeda'sgo-between among the region's terrorist groups. He masterminded the Bali bombingand is linked to just about every other terrorist incident in Southeast Asia.His last plot, foiled by his capture, according to one of the contributors tothis book [p 114], was to bomb the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit inBangkok. Then Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (or Bashir, in this book's style), "spiritual leader"of the biggest and scariest of the Southeast Asian terrorist outfits, JemaahIslamiya (JI), after much pussyfooting by the weak-willed Indonesiangovernment and pressure from the United States, was finally tried and jailed in March. We slept easier, though with a few nagging doubts. Ba'asyir received only 30months in jail (see Indonesia's trial by terror, March 12). The sentence waslight, the judges said, because "the case against him was weak". Weak? Howcould it be weak? This is the man variously accused of being (like Hambali) themastermind of the Bali bombings, or the mentor of those who did the deed thatkilled 202 people, mostly Australians, and of being (somehow) behind countless other acts of terrorism in Indonesia. And the Americans had Hambali, Ba'asyir'slink to al-Qaeda, under interrogation for a year and a half before Ba'asyir'strial.The US was extremely displeased by the lightness of the sentence. The onlyproblem was, Washington had refused to produce Hambali, who would have been the smoking gun in the case against Ba'asyir. So who is this Hambali, we wonderedas our sleep became disturbed again. Why won't the Americans produce thisprize catch? Is he what they claim he is? Does he really exist? How real is this"terrorist threat"? The newspapers aren't answering these questions - theyaren't even asking them. All they are doing is assuring us there is a dire threat.Could it be their case is as weak as the one against Ba'asyir?To ease our troubled minds, we turn to this book. Here are 12 distinguishedacademics and experts, each with their own chapter, assessing the terroristthreat to the region. Here, we think, we will be sure to find the evidence andthe answers to our questions: these people, after all, have made a career out ofstudying the issue.It's hard evidence we are looking for, so we go straight to the copious notesat the end of each chapter: we want to go to the sources. The first thing wenotice is that the study of terrorism in Southeast Asia has become a veritableindustry. There are chairs, departments, faculties, entire organizationsdevoted to the subject. There is an untold number of academic papers, studies,government white papers, and reports by law enforcement agencies. Well, we'llleave the governments' and interrogators' reports aside for the moment - we'renot sure we trust them. Still, we're encouraged. It looks like we're about tolearn everything we ever wanted to know about terrorism in Southeast Asia.Then a niggling disappointment. The various writers frequently cite eachother as sources. Professor Carlyle A Thayer cites Peter Chalk who cites ProfessorZachary Abuza; all are contributors to this book. Are we about to go aroundin circles, we wonder? And just about all the contributors cite RohanGunaratna. Well, that's not surprising: Gunaratna is the dean of al-Qaeda studies; he'sthe authority cited by everyone from Asia Times Online to the mainstreammedia to academics; he is the MOTHERLODE! And of course he has his chapter in thisbook, so we turn to him first, but not before we notice that an awful lot ofnewspapers and magazines are also cited as sources, and we remind ourselvesthat they are part of our problem, not the solution.Gunaratna's chapter is titled "Understanding al-Qaeda and its Network inSoutheast Asia". His contention is that with the loss of Afghanistan and thepressures on it in Pakistan, al-Qaeda has been forced to decentralize, though itsstrategic, tactical and ideological direction "is still intact" (source cited:Gunaratna). "By decentralizing ... al-Qaeda has successfully networked withdisparate groups and in some cases co-opted their leaders. This was particularlythe case in Southeast Asia" (no source cited). And threat there is indeed:apart from "suicide terrorism coupled with conventional attacks ... the group isalso considering revisiting the maritime and the chemical, biological,radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) scenarios ..." (no source cited). And if that werenot enough, "some existing and emerging groups will seek to match it[al-Qaeda] or even exceed it ...".Turning to Jemaah Islamiya, Gunaratna tells us that "al-Qaeda has penetrated[JI]" and the two groups "have divided their responsibilities, personnel,infrastructure, and areas of operation into territorial organizations calledmantiqis". But he does not tell us where he gets this information. We're expectedto take his word for it. (Elsewhere in this book Peter Chalk mentions the sameinformation and at least lets us know it's from a Singapore government whitepaper: the thought occurs that perhaps Gunaratna had a hand in writing thatwhite paper, but we won't follow that up just now; we've had enough of viciouscircles). Then the caliphate predictably rears its ugly head: "In addition toemphasizing the importance of participating in a global jihad, it [al-Qaeda]created a mission and a vision for the Islamists to build a caliphate ...comprising Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Mindanao" (no sourcecited).Gunaratna reveals some damning evidence against Abu Bakar Ba'asyir: "Recentrecoveries from Afghanistan include documents with extensive references toal-Qaeda's [!] spiritual leader in Southeast Asia, Abu Bakar Bashir, Hambali, andother directing figures of the al-Qaeda network in the region." Strange

that the judges at Ba'asyir's trial seems not to have made much of this timely "recovery". Come to think of it, why was Gunaratna himself not called as a witness? He could well and truly have nailed Ba'asyir. Disheartened, we get to the notes at the end of Gunaratna's chapter. Compared to the other chapters, there are very few notes, and only two main sources are cited: one is the illustrious author of *Inside al-Qaeda*, Gunaratna himself; the other is "Mohammed Mansour Jabarah, debriefing, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), US Department of Justice, August 6, 2002" (Ibid, ibid, ibid). Mohammed Mansour Jabarah, a Kuwaiti-born Canadian and JI member, was captured in Oman in March 2002. He is alleged to have been one of the key planners in a major plot uncovered in Singapore that was to involve coordinated bombing of US warships at the Changi Naval Base, the Ministry of Defense, a shuttle bus, the British and American high commissions, the US and Israeli embassies, and American business premises. During his euphemistically termed "debriefing", he apparently sang loud and clear to his FBI interrogators, and Gunaratna was allowed access to the transcripts of the interrogation. So there we have it. This is as close to a real source as we are going to get. It's time to take stock. We have a book written by various authorities in the field, most of whom cite Rohan Gunaratna; Gunaratna cites as his source interrogation transcripts that the US government has allowed him to see. So it would seem, judging by this book at least, that these warnings of dire threats to Southeast Asia from al-Qaeda-linked international terrorism are based on sources of information that turn out to be the US government and its allies themselves. And that's a knockout blow. We already know what the governments want us to think. We are trying to find out the truth. The threat is taken as a given by the writers of this book, and on this unquestioned assumption towering academic edifices are built. Time after time, the familiar claims about Ba'asyir, Hambali and al-Qaeda's involvement in the region are trotted out as if it were all blindingly self-evident. The trouble is, the ultimate source of the information is Washington. The rest is a vicious circle, with academics and experts writing books like this one, and the media swallowing everything whole and citing the academics who cite the media and each other. The rubble and bodies on Bali spoke for themselves, but that was almost three years ago. Not a lot happened before or since then - apart from the foiling of many alleged plots. Could it be that international, Islamist terrorism has been stamped out in Southeast Asia by its super-efficient governments, courts, intelligence agencies and law enforcers, with help, of course, from Washington? We doubt it, but nor do we think the threat is as dire as we are being told. Various governments and agencies have a clear vested interest in such a threat being seen to exist. They have been abetted in this by the mainstream Western media, which have been wearing dunce's caps since September 11, 2001. The PhDs should go and join them in the corner.

This timely work examines the scale and root causes of terrorism across Southeast Asia, including the role of al-Qaeda's ascendancy in the region. It begins with an overview of the analytical and theoretical framework for discussing the subject. Individual chapters then examine terrorist activities from both functional and country-specific perspectives. The book traces fundamental linkages between terrorism and security issues, such as illegal immigration, narcotics trafficking, and other criminal activity. In addition, it considers the issue of convergence - the growing connection between criminal groups and terrorism, and how this may facilitate future violence. Written by a range of experts in the field, the individual chapters reflect a variety of perspectives. The contributions fall into two broad categories - chapters that directly address terrorism (the groups, their ideologies, their modus operandi, their origins, and state responses to them); and chapters that address the "enabling environment" that exists in Southeast Asia (the role of transnational crime, porous borders, convergence between terrorism and crime).