

Book Review: Seeds of Terror

The book entitled, “Seeds of Terror”, examines evidence of terrorist activity in Southeast Asian countries. It is an eyewitness account by Maria A. Ressa, about Al-Qaeda’s Center of Operations emerging in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia. She recalls her own, as she has lived through many of the terrorists’ attacks in the region. Over the years, al-Qaeda successfully infiltrated and co-opted homegrown Muslim movements in: North America, Europe, the Middle East, Chechnya, Kashmir, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Groups from these regions have their own domestic agendas, but they are also pushing al-Qaeda’s anti-Western goals. Through al-Qaeda, terrorist organizations around the world have exchanged tactics and information. This book shows the silence that has been slipping beneath the sensors of intelligence and law-enforcement agencies since 1988. Maria Ressa travels to four nations in the region, talks with common people on the street and in the highest levels of government and intelligence, and gives us an unprecedented look at the region, the growth of al Qaeda, the players at work, and the future of terrorism.

Al-Qaeda has encouraged local groups to carve out autonomous Islamic areas that can be linked together worldwide. Much like fascism and communism before, their goal is political power and world dominion, but mainly to replace democracy with Islamic Shariah law. Indonesia and its neighboring countries have become fertile ground for the terrorist network al Qaeda. In fact, nations like Indonesia, which at 200 million has the world’s largest Muslim population. The terror in Bali could have been prevented exclaims Ressa, as she tells her readers that Indonesian police had had the names of every

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single one of the Bali plotters well in advance. The lessons hadn't been learned, and seven years and hundreds of intelligence documents later, it comes down to meticulously connecting the dots to find it leading to the same small group of men inciting a global jihad. The leaders of al Qaeda who planned the September 11 attacks are the very same people who set up the terrorist networks and activated their plots in the region. It is through these networks that al Qaeda has helped trigger and fuel the jihad in Asia. Based on evidence of her own investigation, the Bali bombing was indeed the work of al-Qaeda, which provided funds, training, and some of the personnel to supplement Jemaah Islamiyah's home grown recruiting. It was the orders from al-Qaeda's number two that Jemaah Islamiyah switched from Plan A in Singapore to Plan B in Bali.

Malaysia is often cited as a model for Southeast Asia. It was only after the September 11 attacks, that it became clear that there was an entrenched al-Qaeda network in Malaysia. It also became apparent that the network had other ambitious plots developing simultaneously with the 9/11 attack. In 2002, KSM, former military chief of al Qaeda, sent Zacarias Moussaoui to the Malaysian Flying Academy, to see whether he could train to fly the wide-bodied aircraft. KSM said Moussaoui used the money he was given for flight training to buy ammonium nitrate. Ammonium nitrate, a fertilizer easily turned into explosives, had been present in the 1993 World Trade Center attack. Yazid Sufaat, a U.S. educated biochemist and former Malaysian army captain, is the deputy for al Qaeda's fifth division and owned a company called, Green Laboratory Medicine. The 1987 biochemistry graduate of Cal State Sacramento was developing biological weapons for al-Qaeda. This may be why Moussaoui was interested in learning how to fly crop dusters. Fortunately, Sufaat could not buy the right strain of anthrax that could be

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dispersed as a weapon. Though the world's attention was focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan, she predicted that the next major battleground would be to their south and east, in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and other countries where al-Qaeda was busily setting up its training camps and financial networks, where it had already been active for years. Even then, al-Qaeda members in the Philippines were planning what would become the 9/11 attacks, carried out because their discovery in 1995 had been ignored by authorities around the world. Now Philippines, Indonesia, and neighboring countries had blossomed into one of al-Qaeda's most important centers.

What makes Southeast Asia such fertile ground for al-Qaeda is its large Muslim population within a political landscape that is much more open and fractured than the Arab Middle East. The war on terror is not going well. In Southeast Asia, terrorists are escaping from prison, and plenty of evidence suggests that some attacks could have been prevented. Prior to the Bali bombing, the Indonesian government, despite the warnings from neighboring countries, Western nations, and its own military intelligence unit, chose to ignore ominous warnings of an impending attack by a network that had already attacked in 2000. The ease with which massive explosives were obtained and the relative simplicity of the plan make it virtual certainty that something like it will happen again.

One of the author's strongest arguments comes from her postlude called "By Tongue and Teeth". After the first man arrested and officially linked to Bali, she searched through the intelligence documents and found the exact name in a document that was the interrogation report of an Al Qaeda operative in custody in Singapore. It was clear Indonesia knew Amrozi was part of a terrorist network more than six months before the Bali blasts. Amrozi was the one who brought the van and explosives for Bali.

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In mid-2002, intelligence officials in Southeast Asia told Ressa, there were at least 12 tons of explosives missing in Southeast Asia feared to be in the hands of Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda. In March 2003, four tons in Malaysia were recovered, it was the ammonium nitrate originally purchased by Sufaat. The other caches however, have not been found.

Maria Ressa documents how every terrorist attack since 1993, including 9/11, has had a connection to the Philippines. She mentions the impact that United States Special Forces had on the fight against the ASG and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2001. She believes that U.S. forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines were unable to eliminate those terrorist threats because of politics and policies. Her background as an expert on the workings of Southeast Asian terrorist networks helps her understand the nature of unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency, and the importance of intelligence and link analysis. Using Southeast Asia as a focal point, it becomes evident that al-Qaeda used the same tactics to recruit, train, and mobilize thousands of Islamic fighters all over the world. Above all, the author has seen how al-Qaeda's tactics are shifting under the pressures of the war on terror. The network is now tangling itself in local conflicts, establishing Muslim independence movements wherever they can be found, and helping local "revolutionaries" to fund, plan and execute sinister attacks against their neighbors, and the West (Ressa 205). Thanks to classified investigative documents uncovered by Ressa, many of those plans have already been discovered and revealed.