



Testimony before

**The House International Relations Subcommittee
on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation**

Hearing on:

"Evolving Counterterrorism Strategy"

As delivered by:

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Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for inviting me to speak today on the evolving counterterrorism strategy. I must begin my testimony with the disclaimer that the following statements are my personal views and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Heritage Foundation.

The question before us is whether or not the current national strategy for the war on terrorism is sufficient to defeat the evolving terrorist threat. The short answer is yes, but with a change in emphasis from direct military action to more indirect methods.

The introduction of the February 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* calls for, “direct and continuous action against terrorist groups.” This operational approach has dislocated Al Qaeda from its base in Afghanistan, destroyed more than two-thirds of its leadership and disrupted its ability to plan attacks against the United States. However, Al Qaeda’s global following is at least as strong today as it was on September 11, 2001. If this ability to regenerate itself is not neutralized, then, no amount of military action will prevent further attacks against the United States and its allies.

On the other hand, successes against terrorists in South and Southeast Asia may point to a new approach in the war on terrorism. Major terrorist groups have been either destroyed or neutralized in this region with little direct American participation. Three of the most important achievements in the war on terrorism in South and Southeast Asia since 9/11 are the ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan; the negotiated peace settlement between the government of Indonesia and the separatist Free Aceh Movement, also known by its Indonesian acronym GAM for *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*; and the neutralization of the Al Qaeda affiliated Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia. All three of these victories resulted from local solutions involving tough military or security measures combined with a political process.

It is well known that before 9/11, Pakistan was a state sponsor of terrorism, particularly against India. Since 9/11, however, President Musharraf has diligently worked to put a lid on the terrorist groups in his country. On April 18, 2005, President Pervez Musharraf and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed a declaration heralding a peace process that they announced was irreversible. Since then, cross border terrorist attacks from Pakistan into India declined by 60 percent. An Indian-built anti-infiltration fence along the border also contributed to the reduction in cross border access for terrorists. Although final resolution between the two countries still seems distant, there appears to be little desire for a return to military confrontation or sponsorship of terrorism. Peace between Pakistan and India is an important key to the war on terrorism, and in order to achieve this outcome, letting India and Pakistan develop the peace process at a pace that they are comfortable with is the best possible solution.

In Southeast Asia, a comprehensive strategy of military muscle and political compromise defeated a chronic insurgency linked to regional terrorists.

Although the devastation of the tsunami in Aceh is often credited with bringing the Indonesian government and GAM to the negotiating table, the peace agreement is actually the result of a number of activities started long before the tsunami struck.

Two years before the tsunami the Indonesian military had launched a comprehensive campaign in Aceh that not only attacked the GAM military, but also sought to win over the Acehnese people. The strategy was successful because of the ongoing reform in the Indonesian military to reduce human rights abuses, as well as the inability of GAM to restrain the abuses of its military forces and its "tax collectors." By the time the tsunami struck, GAM's military was suffering from combat fatigue, and its civilian base was severely eroded¹.

¹ Schulze, Kirsten E., "The Helsinki Peace Process: Reaching Understanding in Aceh in the Wake of the Tsunami. Not yet published.

More important, but complimentary to the military campaign, was Indonesia's democratic transition. In 1998, Indonesia was an authoritarian government propped up by the military. By 2004, Indonesia was a full democracy and the military was finally, albeit not absolutely, accountable to an elected civilian leadership. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had national and international credibility not enjoyed by any of his predecessors. In one stroke, GAM's reputation transformed from an insurgency fighting an authoritarian government to a terrorist group with ties to Al Qaeda.

When the tsunami struck, GAM was already on the ropes and ready to compromise. The subsequent peace agreement between GAM and the Indonesian government put a hole in the regional terrorist network and provided a good example of a successful anti-terrorist strategy. The most dangerous Al Qaeda linked terrorist group in Southeast Asia was Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), responsible for the Bali bombing in 2002, the Marriot bombing in 2004 and suspected of a host of other bombings across Southeast Asia. But in September 2005 Gareth Evans, President of the International Crisis Group, declared that JI was "effectively smashed" and "no longer constituted a serious threat."

This remarkable change of fortune for JI came about because of good police work and the democratic transition in Indonesia. The United States, Australia and the international community invested heavily in training and equipping Southeast Asia's police, prosecutors and judiciaries. Although the Indonesian and much of Southeast Asia's legal system are still rife with corruption, under staffed and subject to political influence, these reforms have shown notable results. Additionally, while the police have arrested and convicted active JI members, the democratic transition has apparently dried up the recruit pool. Jemaah Islamiyah originally was founded to oppose Indonesia's authoritarian government. With former dictator Suharto out and a

democratically elected President and legislature in the armed struggle had lost its point to many of its supporters.

The lessons for America's evolving national security strategy are that the reasons and motivations behind the actions of terrorist groups are complex. As much as possible, local solutions must be found and supported. As the terrorists move underground, military operations increasingly will be replaced with police work and intelligence sharing. The evolving national counterterrorism strategy should emphasize an indirect approach by supporting democracy, the rule of law and economic development.