

# In the Shadow of Swords: On the Trail of Terrorism from Afghanistan to Australia

Sally Neighbour

Reviewed by Tony LeRay-Meyer

Sally Neighbour has written a worthy contribution to research on the evolution of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the targeting calculus behind the attack in Bali. Her book also places JI coherently within both a regional and global context, and is one of the few works that includes analyses of the 'Islamisation' and 'radicalisation' of key JI players. Neighbour also brings 'us' an awareness of the kernel of JI—the life and networks of the Indonesian exiles in Malaysia. Clive Williams has rightly noted, 'if you only ever intend to read one book about JI and Bali, this is the one I would recommend'.

Neighbour, a reporter with ABC TV's *4-Corners* program, is a highly experienced journalist who has worked as a correspondent in East Asia and travelled extensively in Southeast Asia. Her motivation to investigate JI was both personal and philosophical, and began on assignment within hours of the Bali bombing observing first hand the scenes along Legion Street, Kuta Beach, and in the 'chaotic corridors' of Denpasar's Sanglah Hospital. Soon after, she attended a sermon in Solo, Central Java, given by the alleged spiritual leader of Jemaah Islamiyah, Abu Bakar Bashir. His words, the first response to Bali, were directed at the 'West': 'between you and us there will forever be a ravine of hate'. Sally Neighbour asked herself the crucial question, how had it come to this? As with Jason Burke's book on al Qa'eda, *Casting a Shadow of Terror*, she addresses the critical question—why?

The genre of 'tracking' organisations and networks can often be weighed down in complexity, especially in the trails of names, aliases and associations. The detailed books by Rohan Gunaratna and Sidney Jones are cases in point. One of the key strengths of Neighbour's book is that the journalist in her is never far beneath the surface, resulting in a narrative style that is both authoritative and eminently readable.

Her basic premise was to discover 'what was the 'ravine of hate' and why did it evolve? The book is structured to sequentially analyse the key JI players and their motivations and contribution to the movement. This sequential structure is particularly effective but the scope of the book is perhaps too broad, especially where Neighbour's attempts to place the evolution of JI in both its regional and global contexts is covered too lightly.

She also attempts to place JI and its undercurrent of Muslim humiliation in a broader Islamic historical context. To grasp '... this profound sense of grievance it is necessary to delve back 1500 years ... and the rise and fall of the glorious empire that he [Muhammad] founded on Islamic

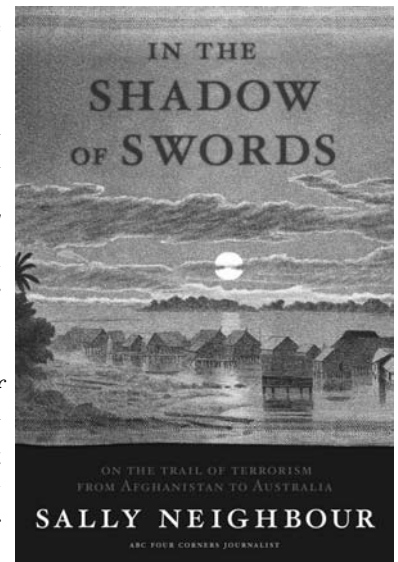
faith'. While some historical context is essential, much of this Islamic history has been well covered by Jason Burke, by Giles Kepel's *Jihad: Trail of Political Islam*, and in John Esposito's *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* and his *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. Neighbour may have been better just integrating their key findings into her narrative rather than attempting her own

historical summary. The result of her 'skimming' in this regard is the missing of detail or the inclusion of inaccuracies. As an example, the development of the Wahhabist movement in Saudi Arabia is not considered in her historical chapter—'Striving in the Path of God'. While her summary of Islamic history is not a crucial weakness in the book, it is one that may leave an uninitiated reader with an inaccurate understanding of the historical complexity.

Neighbour's research includes primary interviews with members from the families and communities of key JI individuals. Her fieldwork includes visits to these communities, thorough research, the use of court transcripts and a willingness to cite authoritative commentary (such as Sidney Jones from the International Crisis Group). The book's major contribution to the understanding of JI is in its analysis of individual lives and its insights into the personal motivations and development of key JI operatives. Individuals such as Muklas and Amrozi are considered in detail, with an eye-opening view provided of their diverse paths to 'radicalisation'. Neighbour reveals the complex web of personal and/or ideological grievances, and the often profound sense of political dislocation in Suharto's Indonesia. In contrast, recalling the broader sense of grievance felt by many Muslims, her analysis of Dr Azahari Husin reveals an educated and 'Westernised' person whose radicalisation was less spiritual and more motivated by a general 'disillusionment about the plight of Muslims'. For many in JI, the contemporary manifestation of this grievance was Suharto's Indonesia. Neighbour answers the 'how' and 'why' by noting that JI represents both a community of shared grievance and a means of response.

In the *Shadow of Swords* is highly useful for both the intelligence analyst and general reader. Sally Neighbour's insights into the 'why' question provide a path to better understanding both 'who and what' JI is and, crucially, the rationale behind the targeting calculus of attacks such as Bali. Of course this leads to the unanswered questions of 'what next' and 'how to respond' to JI. ♦

Sally Neighbour, *In The Shadow of Swords: On the Trail of Terrorism from Afghanistan to Australia*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 2004, Softback, 374pp., RRP \$29.95.



In the Shadow of Swords: On the trail of terrorism from Afghanistan to Australia (Harper Collins 2004) won the 2005 NSW history prize and was named by the Economist as one of its best 25 books for 2005. Sally also edited the book marking Four Corners's 50th anniversary. Sally Warhaft. [SallyWarhaft](mailto:SallyWarhaft). Sally Warhaft is a Melbourne broadcaster, anthropologist and writer. She hosts the Fifth Estate, the Wheeler Centre's live series focusing on journalism, politics, media, and international relations, now in its ninth year. She is a former editor of the Monthly magazine and the author of the bestsel In the Shadow of Swords: on the Trail of Terrorism from Afghanistan to Australia. HarperCollins. Young People's. Note: all references relating to awards can, or should be, found on the relevant award's page. Basis of this page is in Wikipedia. Text is available under the CC BY-SA 3.0 Unported License.