An Indonesian's Prison Memoir Takes Holy War Into Cyberspace

In Sign of New Threat, Militant Offers Tips on Credit Card Fraud

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JAKARTA, Indonesia -- After Imam Samudra was charged with engineering the devastating Bali nightclub bombings two years ago, he taunted his police accusers in court, then greeted his death sentence with the cry, "Infidels die!"

So when Samudra published a jailhouse autobiography this fall, it was not surprising that it contained virulent justifications for the Bali attacks, which killed 202 people, most of them foreign tourists.

But tucked into the back of the 280-page book is a chapter of an entirely different cast titled "Hacking, Why Not?" There, Samudra urges fellow Muslim radicals to take the holy war into cyberspace by attacking U.S. computers, with the particular aim of committing credit card fraud, called "carding." The chapter then provides an outline on how to get started.

The primer on carding is rudimentary, according to U.S. and Indonesian cybercrime experts, but they said the chapter provides a rare glimpse into the mounting threat posed by terrorists using Internet fraud to finance their operations.

"The worry is that an army of people doing cybercrime could raise a great deal of money for other activities that terrorists are carrying out," said Alan Paller, research director of the Sans Institute, a U.S. Internet-security training company.

Samudra, 34, is among the most technologically savvy members of Jemaah Islamiah, an underground Islamic radical movement in Southeast Asia that
is linked to al Qaeda. He sought to fund the Bali attacks in part through online credit card fraud, according to Indonesian police. They said Samudra's laptop computer revealed an attempt at carding, but it was unclear whether he had succeeded.

Internet crime experts said Samudra's book seems unprecedented as a tool for recruiting radical Muslims into a campaign of online fraud and building networks of fundraisers.

"This is exactly the kind of advice you would give someone who wanted to get started in cybercrime," said Paller, who reviewed a translation of the chapter. "It doesn't focus on a specific technique, but focuses on how you find techniques and focuses on connecting with other people to act loosely together."

Titled "Me Against the Terrorist!" the book depicts Samudra on the cover in a now-classic pose from his trial last year in Bali. He is clad in a white shirt and white Muslim skullcap, with his right arm outstretched and a single finger raised as he lectures the judges.

Four thousand copies in Indonesian have been issued by a small publisher and are selling for about $4 each in at least seven cities across the islands of Java and Sumatra, said Achmad Michdan, Samudra's attorney, who wrote the forward. Michdan said the publisher is planning a second run and is considering translating the book into English, French and Arabic. Profits benefit Samudra's wife and children. Samudra remains on death row.

Most of the book is a memoir that tracks Samudra from his early schooling in Java, through his arms training in the Afghan mountains, his exile in Malaysia and his return to Indonesia. It includes arguments for killing Western civilians and bitter critiques of U.S. policy in Israel, Afghanistan and Iraq, including photographs of Muslim civilian casualties.

Toward the end, Samudra informs readers that the United States is not as invincible as they might think.

"It would not be America if the country were secure. It would not be America if its computer network were impenetrable," he writes at the beginning of the hacking chapter. He continues by urging fellow militants to exploit this opening: "Any man-made product contains weakness because man himself is a weak creature. So it is with the Americans, who boast they are a strong nation."

The chapter is less a how-to manual than a course of study for aspiring hackers and carders. Samudra directs them to specific Indonesian-language Web sites that provide instruction. For those who find these sites too sophisticated, he counsels first learning computer programming languages, in particular Linux, and suggests several other Web sites, including one run by young Muslims. Then he advises learning about hacking by finding mentors through online chats. He lists six chat rooms as sources.

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