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Rise of Islamic State Networks in Indonesia

By Jolene Jerard

Synopsis

The recent brazen attack in the Jakarta city centre signals the rise of IS terrorist networks in Southeast Asia.

Commentary

A COORDINATED attack on 14 January 2016 by four Indonesian militants in the Thamrin area of Jakarta sent waves of alarm in the Indonesian capital city with ripple effects felt in the Southeast Asian region. Claiming responsibility for the attack, the so-called Islamic State (IS) released a statement titled “Islamic State Special Operation Targets Gathering of Crusader Coalition Citizens in Jakarta” through its news agency - Amaq News via the Telegram messaging app. According to the statement the attack was conducted by the *junud khilafah* or soldiers of the caliphate. The four operatives, who were killed during the attack, represent part of the IS network in Indonesia.

Unlike the hierarchical nature of the groups that had dominated the Indonesian terrorism landscape in the past such as the Al Qaeda linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the present alliance of a loose network of operatives are in a better tactical position to hide their activities. The challenge of self-radicalised individuals, lone wolves and sleeper cells threatens the management of the security of the regional landscape in Asia as IS aspires to target urban city centres.

IS Global Outreach

Since the declaration of the so-called caliphate in June 2014, IS has steadily deployed its plan for global outreach. To date, over 65 attacks in almost 20 countries have killed approximately 1000 people outside Iraq and Syria. The expansive

outreach of IS can be attributed to the appeal that IS has generated through the conquest of territory, and capturing the imagination of sections of the community through the calculated domination of the cyber space to propagate ideas and coordinate attacks.

In August 2014 the Indonesian government banned IS as it was against the state ideology of Pancasila. The ban was initiated after the release of a video *Joining the Ranks* where an Indonesian in Syria, Bahrum Syah alias Abu Muhammad al-Indunisi attempted to galvanise support from fellow Indonesians to join the ranks of IS in Syria. In spite of this ban, approximately 800 Indonesians are believed to have joined IS, the largest number from one country in Southeast Asia.

Terrorists constantly respond to the environment within which they operate. The IS Network is no different. Bahrum Syah who heads *Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyah* (The Malay Archipelago Battalion for the Islamic State) appears to be focused on ideology and fighting in Syria. Since mid-2015, the *Katibah Nusantara* in Syria (KN) was reported to be divided into three geographical regional sub-divisions with Bahrum Syah as leader of KN, Abu Abdillah leading the sub-division in Aleppo and Salim Mubarak Attamimi alias Abu Jandal leading the group in Homs.

Muhammad Bahrun Naim Anggih Tamtomo, another Indonesian fighter in turn has been actively facilitating the operations in Indonesia while based in Syria. Bahrun Naim goes by other aliases including Abu Aisyah al-Indunisy Hafidzullah. It is unclear how many of the foreign fighter returnees are working with Bahrun Naim. The Jakarta attacks and the waves of arrest in August and December 2015, reveal small networks that are possibly receiving instruction from IS Central through the conduit of Bahrun Naim with the aspiration of expanding IS Central's goal for a *wilayat* (province) in Southeast Asia. They could more accurately be termed the *Junud Khilafah* in Indonesia (JK-I) and vary from KN led by Bahrum Syah.

IS in Indonesia: A Loose Network of Operatives?

The inherent fear of the return of radicalised foreign fighters from Syria is exacerbated by the presence of a possible alliance of a loose network of IS operatives in Indonesia or JK-I. This network possibly organised in cellular clusters, receive instructions from IS through Indonesian IS fighter Bahrun Naim who has facilitated attacks in Indonesia while based in Syria.

In August 2015, police foiled a series of attacks targeting police officers and places of worship in Solo that were planned for Indonesia's Independence Day. The plan was put together by *Jamaah Anshar Daulah Khilafah Nusantara* (JAKDN), a group established in March 2015. JAKDN aimed to send Indonesians to Iraq and Syria. The foiled attack was funded by Bahrun Naim. In October 2015, police had received threats from IS that they will '*conduct a concert*' in Jakarta. A blog post by Bahrun Naim in November 2015 listed lessons that could be gleaned from the organisational strategy of terrorists operating in Europe.

Central Influence and Diffused Structure

The organisational strategy that Bahrun Naim then envisioned and operationalised

was to identify selected individuals of competence, whilst building operational cells around them. This enabled the creation of a loose network reaching out to IS Central via Bahrun Naim as the conduit. It is a delicate balance that provides a semblance of control and influence while facilitating the tactical autonomy of the operational cells through a diffused structure.

The series of raids in December 2015 saw some 13 individuals in two networks arrested for their plans to conduct attacks in Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan. The first network led by Abu Jundi alias Abdul Karim, a former member of JI, is known to have recruited and sent Indonesians to join IS in Syria. The second network led by Arif Hidayatullah planned to carry out attacks against senior law enforcement officers. Both these networks connected to Bahrun Naim targeted Shi'ite places of worship and foreigners.

The asymmetric threat posed by terrorist organisations is never static. The evolution of the groups in Indonesia poses a challenge to security officials as Indonesia and Southeast Asia brace themselves for the strategic challenge of urban terrorism in the future.

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