

ISIS: Questions about its Survival and Ideology

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Recent attacks in Jakarta (in January) and Basilan (in April) which were inspired by the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) underscore the persistence of Southeast Asian terrorism. Against this backdrop, ISIS has exploited the opportunity to expand its reach and appeal among jihadi elements and some segments of the Muslim community in the region. Southeast Asian governments have stepped up counter-terrorism efforts, as is evidenced by the heightened counter-terror operations and arrests of radicalised individuals planning to make their way to Syria and Iraq.

In this issue, we cast a spotlight on whether ISIS can sustain itself in light of the increased military campaigns by the international coalitions and ground initiatives in Syria and Iraq. **Ahmad Saiful Rijal Bin Hassan** shares his thoughts on ISIS' likely eventual defeat, its implications for global security, and the importance of counter-ideological efforts to neutralise the spread of ISIS' ideology.

With female jihadi activists coming to greater prominence in Southeast Asia, **V. Arianti and Nur Azlin Yasin** explore the ways Southeast Asian (Indonesian and Malaysian) female jihadi activists are effectively mobilising new media technologies to promote terrorism. The authors conclude that a better understanding of the modus operandi and motivations of the female jihadi activists will enable governments to more effectively counter the spread of female cyber-jihad activism.

We focus also on the threat of transnational terrorism and political violence in the context of Southeast Asian regional security. Here, **Laura Steckman** offers an assessment of the causes for the growth of extremism in East Malaysia, the security risks from the ISIS-affiliated, Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Malaysia, and the necessary response to this development.

Last but not least, **Rohan Gunaratna** explains the extent of threat arising from ISIS' influence in the Philippines in the light of two trends: the pledges of allegiance from a growing number of militant groups in Mindanao, and the appointment of ASG's former deputy leader, Isnilon Hapilon, as the overall leader of the so-called Islamic State in the Philippines by ISIS' self-appointed caliph. Gunaratna notes that there is now an increased likelihood that the group will declare an ISIS Wilayah in southern Philippines.

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ISIS

QUESTIONS ABOUT ITS SURVIVAL & IDEOLOGY

Ahmad Saiful Rijal Bin Hassan

The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is reported to be on the retreat as a result of strong military actions by the U.S.-led coalition as well as Russian and Syrian forces. The ground situation, however, is not entirely unfavourable to ISIS – even if it is eventually defeated militarily, it will still be in a position to pose serious challenges on the security and ideological fronts. More vigorous counter-terrorism measures are necessary to neutralise ISIS and the spread and influence of its violent jihadi-Salafist ideology.

ISIS under Severe Pressure

Recent reports suggest that ISIS has suffered serious losses on the battlefield. U.S. military spokesman Colonel Steve Warren has revealed that coalition air strikes over the last 20 months have killed 25,000 fighters, reducing ISIS army by half (The Straits Times 2016). According to U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken, ISIS has lost some 40 per cent of its territory in Iraq and 10 per cent in Syria (The Guardian 2016). Bombing raids on ISIS-held oil fields have reduced their revenue by a third, forcing ISIS to cut its fighters' salaries by 50 per cent. The number of recruits has declined as a result of tighter border control in Turkey. Many key ISIS leaders, including its second in command and finance minister, have been killed either by precision drone attacks or U.S. Special Forces.

Colonel Warren believes it is only a matter of time before ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi himself is also eliminated. These rather upbeat reports point to the likely eventual defeat of ISIS, especially as more attacks are being planned as part of the U.S.-led global coalition efforts to “degrade and destroy” the jihadi-

Image Source: Dabiq



Salafi militant group. U.S. Defense Secretary, Ashton B Carter, has confirmed that the U.S. administration will increase its military efforts to defeat ISIS (Schmidt and Schmitt 2016). Colonel Warren has revealed that a “huge bombing campaign” will soon be unleashed on ISIS *de facto* capital Raqqa in Syria. Military operations are already underway to retake Mosul, the *de facto* capital in Iraq. Augmenting traditional weapons, the U.S. is now dropping ‘cyber bombs’ to disrupt ISIS’ communications and outreach efforts online (Sanger 2016).

In the aftermath of the Paris and Brussels bombings, ISIS may eventually suffer the same fate as Al Qaeda whose 9/11 attacks led to the invasion of Afghanistan, the overthrow of the Taliban regime and the scattering of Al Qaeda members and followers. ISIS may not be able to withstand for long the relentless and concerted attacks from the air by U.S.-led coalition, Russian and Syrian forces as well as on the ground by the Kurdish, Iraqi, and Syrian armies. It is losing land, fighters and oil fields, and its arms depots, warehouses, oil tankers and buildings are being blown up.

ISIS faces pressure not only on the military front but also from the Muslim world which has denounced ISIS as un-Islamic, deviant and even heretical. In August 2014, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia condemned ISIS and Al Qaeda for their extremism and terrorism, and branded them enemies of Islam. In September 2014, 126 top Muslim scholars, *imams* and *muftis*, including the Grand Mufti of Egypt, issued an open letter to al Baghdadi, denouncing ISIS for committing numerous religious transgressions and abominable crimes. Earlier, the influential Qatar-based Egyptian theologian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, president of the World Federation of Muslim Scholars, announced that Baghdadi’s declaration of a Caliphate “is void under the sharia” (Al Arabiya News 2014).

ISIS atrocities have also drawn condemnations from Muslim communities around the world. Following the beheading of a British aid-worker in October 2014, a group of young British Muslims launched an online campaign, #NotInMyName, deploring ISIS for hijacking their faith; one estimate of its reach suggests that the hashtag touched 300 million people (Casciani 2014). #NotInMyName was revived after the Paris bombings in November 2015. Following the Jakarta attacks in January 2016, Indonesians initiated the hashtag #KamiTidakTakut

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(#WeAreNotAfraid) in another open challenge to ISIS. Earlier, in November 2015, the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world’s largest Muslim group with 40 million members, released a 90-minute film criticising ISIS’ perverse interpretation of religious texts. The film has been translated into English and Arabic and posted online for a wider audience. The overwhelming condemnation and rejection of ISIS by Muslim communities and respected scholars worldwide should confine its influence to the fringes of the Muslim world.

ISIS is facing problems even within its own ranks. Reports are emerging of some fighters defecting and leaving ISIS altogether although the full extent is not known. *The Guardian* (29 February 2016) for instance reported tensions between 75 Dutch jihadists (some of Moroccan origin) and ISIS intelligence operatives, resulting in eight Dutchmen being killed for alleged desertion and mutiny in Raqqa province. Some fighters have quit because their wages have been slashed, and some are trying to avoid frontline duties by getting doctors to issue “false medical reports” (Webb 2016). According to the U.S. Combating Terrorism Centre (CTC) at West Point, ISIS had to issue a general amnesty for deserters in October 2015 (al-Tamimi 2016). The group’s troubles with its fighters’ morale have emerged as ISIS “struggles to deal with territory losses, military pressure, financial problems and poor management” (Webb 2016).

There are also reports of ongoing ISIS executions of alleged spies and anti-ISIS elements. Shortages of food, water and electricity in occupied territories compound the problems as ISIS has now also to contend with disgruntled residents.

ISIS is not finished...yet

Military setbacks, worldwide Muslim opposition, and the adverse ground situation in Iraq and Syria do not however mean that ISIS is on the verge of collapse. Sunni grievances over discrimination, misgovernance and human rights abuses against the Shiite-dominated governments in Baghdad and Damascus provide ISIS with ample grounds for exploitation. ISIS continues to fuel the sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shiites, attacking the latter and their places of worship. Its English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, recently (January 2016) carried a lengthy article inciting Sunnis with allegations of Shiite religious transgressions and conspiracies.

Serious rivalries between the global/regional powers and their respective proxies and allies also work in ISIS' favour. Their conflicting strategies and political and military objectives have hampered an all-out anti-ISIS campaign, giving some respite to ISIS fighters. The Saudis and Iranians are determined not to let the other gain any geopolitical advantage in the region while the Turks seem more concerned with containing the Kurds. Meanwhile, the Russian and Syrian air strikes are reported to have targeted anti-Bashar al-Assad opposition groups more than ISIS. A recent *Time* article (29 March 2016) on the Iraqi operation to retake Mosul notes that "battlefield incompetence, a lack of trust from the local population, and divisions among the various forces fighting ISIS are slowing the fight."

Related to this is the question of whether military means alone can destroy ISIS. Jonathan Powell, the chief British negotiator in northern Ireland and former PM Tony Blair's chief of staff, writes that the White House has rightly emphasised that "there is no military solution" to the ISIS problem (Powell 2015). He argues that past experience "demonstrates the need for a political strategy, as well as a military one, to defeat the idea behind a terrorist movement". Powell contends that if "an armed group enjoys significant political support, ending its violence has historically required addressing the grievances on which the

“ Another ‘advantage’ ISIS has is its ability to market its distorted version of Islam – jihadi-Salafism – to the Muslim world. ”

group feeds". Sunni complaints of discrimination, persecution and marginalisation will therefore have to be addressed to prevent their continued exploitation by ISIS.

Another 'advantage' ISIS has is its ability to market its distorted version of Islam – jihadi-Salafism – to the Muslim world. Through its propaganda machinery, ISIS has promoted the religious legitimacy of its self-proclaimed Caliphate, as well as its offensive jihad, suicide bombings, 'lone-wolf' attacks, and brutal executions. ISIS has called on Muslims to migrate (*hijrah*) to the Caliphate, claiming that it is a religious obligation. ISIS' *wilayats* (provinces) have been created in and outside the Middle East, with allegiances coming from separatists, rebels and other dubious groups. In Southeast Asia, groups such as Abu Sayyaf, Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid and Mujahidin Indonesia Timor have already pledged allegiance to ISIS.

ISIS' 'Plan B'

Even if ISIS is defeated and its so-called Caliphate collapses, it may not go out of business so soon. Many Muslim extremist and militant groups like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (formed in 1984), Al Qaeda (1988), Abu Sayyaf (1991), Taliban (early 1990s), Jemaah Islamiyah (1993) and Boko Haram (2002) have shown themselves to be resilient and are able to operate with impunity despite government crackdowns and the removal of many of their top leaders. ISIS can therefore be expected to survive and retain its capability to mount terrorist attacks such as those in Paris, Brussels and Istanbul, even if it loses political

power.

ISIS is likely to have back-up plans should it be routed in Iraq and Syria. ‘Plan B’ probably involves operating clandestinely in Iraq and Syria as well as relocating to another territory most conducive to its development (just as Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda did in 1996 when, under U.S. pressure, they left Sudan for Mullah Omar’s Afghanistan where they plotted the 9/11 terrorist attacks and others). Libya appears to be the most likely destination. Officials are reportedly worried that Libya “is increasingly becoming a sort of fall back option for ISIS as it loses territory and power in Iraq and Syria” (Robins-Early 2016).

ISIS did in fact declare its intention to establish a presence in Libya as early as 2014. ISIS’ ranks there have now doubled to about 6,500 fighters and it is “thought to control 150 miles of the country’s coastline” (Chandler 2016). More than half a dozen ISIS commanders have arrived from Syria to further bolster the group’s position. Should Raqqa or Mosul be recaptured, a new Caliphate may well be installed in Muammar Gaddafi’s hometown, Sirte. ISIS’ growth in Libya has been attributed to the political chaos in the country, support from disgruntled regions and a steady flow of jihadis from neighbouring Tunisia (Kahlaoui 2016).

Two other vulnerable areas where ISIS can flourish are the lawless areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan (where the ISIS Khorasan ‘province’ was established in January 2015) and the southern Philippines’ islands of Mindanao and others where several militant groups have pledged allegiance to ISIS.

ISIS’ defeat would also not mean the end of violent jihadi-Salafism or its propagation. Several other extremist and militant groups like Al Qaeda, Jabhat al Nusra, Taliban, Boko Haram and Abu Sayyaf subscribe to jihadi-Salafism or variations of it. ISIS’ idea of the Caliphate will find some resonance among the marginalised and discontented. In Southeast Asia, it overlaps with Jemaah Islamiyah’s aim of creating a *Daulah Islamiyah* (Islamic state) in the ‘Malay’ archipelago. Jihadi-Salafism also provides a convenient ‘religious cover’ and ‘justification’ to the many acts of banditry and violence perpetrated by separatists, rebels and what amounts to nothing more than criminal gangs.

“Exit strategies and reintegration programmes for defeated and returning ISIS fighters will have to be developed to detoxify fighters of the extremist ideology they have imbibed over the years.”

Going Forward

Whether ISIS survives as a rogue state, goes underground or relocates to ‘safe havens’, it will continue to present a formidable challenge on the political, military, security and ideological fronts. Strong military action is necessary to dislodge ISIS from its position of power and to prevent its access to valuable resources that will allow it to sustain itself and expand. Addressing local socio-economic and political grievances will also be paramount if ISIS is to be deprived of political and military support in Iraq, Syria and Libya. Various security measures ranging from incarceration and financial and travel controls to cyber warfare and joint operations among security services will continue to be necessary to disrupt ISIS networks and communications, and prevent terrorist attacks.

No less significant is the demolition of ISIS’ jihadi-Salafist ideas about the Caliphate, aggressive jihad, suicide bombing, and *takfirism* (ex-communication). ISIS’ ideology is what distinguishes the group from secular and ethnic-based movements fighting for secession, greater autonomy, political reform or regime change. Its distorted and mistaken religious ideas will have to be convincingly debunked.

As stated by the venerable Muslim scholar Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah, president of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies in Abu Dhabi, “if you don’t defeat the ideas intellectually, then the ideas will re-

emerge” (Temple Raston 2014). Another renowned Muslim scholar, Shaykh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi, argues that ISIS’ ideology “is based on a complex system of fallacies that cut the sacred texts from their context”. In his view, ISIS’ actions “are simply a series of crimes perpetrated in the name of Islam” (Al-Yaqoubi 2015).

Counter-ideological efforts must be intensified to delegitimise and discredit ISIS ideology. Better regulation of Islamic education will be necessary to prevent the dissemination of extremist teachings. Exit strategies and reintegration programmes for defeated and returning ISIS fighters will have to be developed to detoxify fighters of the extremist ideology they have imbibed over the years. The task of winning over ISIS’ jihadi-Salafi converts and of preventing others from succumbing to its misguided ideology is formidable. It is however not insurmountable, given that the group’s interpretations of the religious texts are seriously flawed and erroneous, transgressing legal principles and juristic process and methodology. Neutralising ISIS’ violent ideology should be at the forefront of counter-terrorism efforts – it will not only undermine the influence of ISIS and like-minded groups, but also end support for the Caliphate, the use of terror and the exploitation of religion for political and military ends.

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Women's Proactive Roles in Jihadism in Southeast Asia

V. Arianti and Nur Azlin Yasin

In Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, women are playing prominent roles as jihadi activists, leveraging on new media technologies to radicalise and recruit. This represents a marked shift in the roles of Southeast Asian female jihadi activists as compared to more than a decade ago when Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) was operationally active.

Background

The reach and appeal of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Southeast Asia have been quite significant. This is most evident in the areas of recruitment, propaganda and training, as well as logistics and financial support for Southeast Asian terrorist groups. Female jihadi activism has been pervasive online, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. In 2009, Umaymah Hasan Ahmad, the wife of Ayman al Zawahiri (who was Al Qaeda's then Deputy leader and the group's current leader), described female jihadi activism in terms of raising children as future *mujahideen* (jihadi fighters), making donations to jihadi causes, and reaching out to their Muslim sisters through religious outreach (*dakwah*) on jihad in homes, public places, and on the Internet (Nelly Lahoud 2014). Unlike in other parts of the world where female jihadists have been involved in combat or suicide bombings, the practice of Southeast Asian jihadi women have been more or less in line with Umaymah's message of not being directly involved in the battlefield. In particular, female jihadi activism has been confined to the "religious outreach" domain as described above.

From the beginning of 2000 to 2009, there were few signs of an active female jihadi activism online in the Southeast Asian region. Social media and chat group applications in smart phones were not popular then. Internet access in some parts of Southeast Asia was limited to Internet cafes. Females were

involved in recruiting their own gender on the ground (Farish A Noor 2007) and in propagating online extremism. This was seen in articles released in, amongst other extremist sites, *Arrahmah.com*, *Almuhajirun.net* and *Forum al Tawbah*. The articles were centred on women playing a passive role in jihad, supporting their husbands and sons in active combat. Women were also encouraged to raise future generations with the jihadist mindset while their husbands were directly involved in terrorist cells, strategising, planning and conducting terrorist operations.

Female participation in the online extremist domain began to emerge in 2009 (Tuty Raihanah Mostarom and Nur Azlin Mohamed Yasin 2010). This was in sync with a message released by Ayman al Zawahiri's wife, who urged women to support the *mujahideen*. The message was released in the midst of debate among jihadi groups on whether women should be involved in combat. While some agreed, Zawahiri and his wife stood firm on the view that women should only play a supporting role in jihad (Murad Batal al-Shishani 2010). This was the view that was circulated on Southeast Asian sites. During this time, there was an increase in the number of materials directed at women.

Females communicating on extremist forums such as *Arrahmah.com* also increased, with women garnering support from fellow women. There was also a Facebook movement which mirrored real-world support for females in jihad - 'Support Freedom 4 Putri Munawaroh.' The said movement expressed solidarity for the wife of an Indonesian terrorist killed during a Detachment 88 raid in late 2009. Munawaroh, who was then pregnant, was arrested during the raid. She was later put on trial for helping her husband Susilo to render assistance to terrorist Noordin M Top. Top, at that time, was on the authorities' wanted list for his involvement in the 2009 twin bomb attacks on the JW Marriot and Ritz Carlton Hotels. The online movement solicited donations, which they claimed would help support Munawaroh's family visits and keep her morale high. The movement collected Rp. 1,447,585 (US\$ 159) from its pool of 523 male and female supporters in May 2010 (Tuty Raihanah and Nur Azlin 2010).

Recruitment

As reflected in the writing of Umaymah, women are supposed to recruit women only; they should

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only travel in the company of their husbands or close male relatives (*mahram*) and avoid interaction with other men (*non mahram*) (Nelly Lahoud 2014). However, in today's age and time, the online social media chats have dismantled segregation barriers between genders. As such, women have not been hindered from partaking in their online roles to recruit, train, raise funds and propagate their support for ISIS. At least three recruitment cases attest to this. In late 2014, a team of housewives and widows were arrested in Malaysia for recruiting Malaysian undergraduates for ISIS (The Straits Times 2014). In October 2015, Rafiqah Hanum, the wife of a Syrian-based Indonesian ISIS fighter, Bahrun Naim, recruited two Indonesian men for ISIS. The two men, namely Muhammad Rizka Fajri and Firman Fitrialdeldi, were deported from Singapore in November 2015 (The Straits Times 2016). A third case concerned an Indonesian domestic worker in Hong Kong named Tasmina Salsabila who recruited a Bekasi-based ISIS supporter.

The supporter, named Syuhada Umar, was recruited into an ISIS-linked Solo-based cell 'Katibah al Iman' via Whatsapp. Tasmina received an order from a Katibah al Iman leader,

Abu Jundi, to recruit people for his cell. She then contacted ISIS supporters whom she knew from WhatsApp and Telegram groups such as Grup Pembela Tauhid (the group for the defenders of monotheism). One of the men she contacted was Syuhada, who agreed to join. Subsequently, she introduced him to Abu Jundi and her husband, Zainal Akbar. Tasmina also helped strengthen the terrorist network by linking Syuhada to other members of Katibah al Iman such as Zainal, Riswandi and Yudinov Syahputra. Members of the cell were arrested in December 2015 before it became operational.

Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram are popular platforms for jihadi recruiters. Telegram in particular allows its users to conceal their telephone numbers and encrypt their chats. Jihadists find such features attractive because they prevent detection by the authorities. In the past, before WhatsApp chat also became encrypted, the Indonesian government monitored WhatsApp discussion groups. Based on their monitoring, they made a number of arrests throughout the end of December 2015 and January 2016. Consequently, jihadi activists were forced to shut down a number of WhatsApp discussion groups such as Silaturrahim dan Dakwah (brotherhood and propagation) and Daulah IS Haq atau Bathil (the Islamic State is a true or false state). To avoid further government scrutiny, jihadists turned to Telegram discussion groups, and named some of their groups with innocuous non-religious terms such as Warung Kopi (coffee cafe) and Asosiasi Pedagang Online (the association of online traders).

Propaganda and Training

Indonesian and Malaysian jihadi women have also been involved in producing extremist propaganda. Their products are in line with Umaymah's statement that the target audience of the publications are women. A few notable examples include a book written by Paridah Abas, the wife of Mukhlas alias Ali Ghufroon, titled *Orang Bilang, Ayahku Teroris* (People Say, My Father is a Terrorist). The book was published by a JI-linked publishing house in Indonesia and is her memoir of being a "single mother" of six children following the arrest of her husband for his involvement in the 2002 Bali Bombings (Detikcom 2005 and Arrahmah.com 2008). Fatimah Az Zahra, the wife of Abu Jibril (who in the past had helped facilitate the creation of JI in Singapore) also published a novel titled *Perjalanan Cinta Istri Seorang Mujahid* (Love

“ ... since the advent of ISIS, jihadi online movement has shifted to spreading the news of ISIS battlefield victories and campaign against Shia communities. ”

Journey of a Mujahid's wife). The book was published in 2009 by Arrahmah Media (Arrahmah.com 2009), which is owned and run by her husband and sons. Both jihadi publishing houses are pro Al Qaeda and its affiliate group in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra.

In November 2011, besides manning the jihadi website Arrahmah.com, Arrahmah Media also launched a website dedicated to Muslim women, *Muslimahzone.com*. The website contains articles ranging from women in jihad to health, parenting, and cooking tips. Other jihadi websites also typically have a section dedicated for women with similar content. The publication of such material is allowed under Indonesia's democratic norms.

Since the advent of ISIS, jihadi online movement have shifted to spreading the news of ISIS battlefield victories and campaign against Shia communities. ISIS-linked WhatsApp and Telegram discussion groups are full of such materials. ISIS leaders have instructed its supporters to participate in online propaganda securely by using AMN, a mobile messenger application, created by an ISIS programmer.

The materials propagated by female ISIS supporters have included the religious justification for the establishment of ISIS, obligation to wage jihad, the need for polygamy and the dangers of propagating false Shia teachings to Sunni Muslims. Such a role is only possible online. In the real-world, according to

strict Islamic teachings, women would not be allowed to interact with men. This signifies the importance of the online sphere in eliminating such prohibitions. We can observe these trends taking place in WhatsApp groups such as Daulah Akhir Zaman and Telegram groups such as Grup Pembela Tauhid.

Since 2014, female ISIS supporters in the region have also provided guidance on how to perform *hijrah* (emigration) to the 'Islamic State' in Syria. The pioneers were two prominent individuals who went by the online monikers Dr Shams and Siti Khadijah. The former was known for her Tumblr blog 'Diary of a Muhajirah'. Calling herself the 'green bird of Jannah,' Dr Shams narrated her experiences with ISIS, serving to encourage and direct the legions of other women to do likewise. Siti Khadijah communicated via Facebook with individuals who were planning to travel to Syria. She also wrote the first article announcing the establishment of ISIS' Southeast Asian military unit, Majmu'ah Al-Arkhabiliy, known as Katibah Nusantara (KN). The article, which was published on the Bahasa Indonesia extremist website, *Panjimas.com* on 29 September 2014, discussed the basic organisational structure of KN.

The wife of an Indonesian ISIS fighter who went by the online moniker Angsa Hitam (black swan), also wrote about her *hijrah* to Syria in August 2015 with her three kids, aged five, three and one. Angsa Hitam is the wife of Nanang Pambudianto who was once featured in an ISIS video on refugees in September 2015. Nanang has been already in Syria since late 2014.

Online entries on *hijrah* by women are detailed and comprehensive. On April 2015, it was revealed in an Indonesian pro-ISIS blog that an Indonesian ISIS fighter had printed and pasted Siti Khadijah's manuals on how to perform *hijrah* on his wall.

Women are also involved in running extremist websites and translating ISIS materials. For instance, Siti Khadijah, along with her husband, were actively managing Khilafah Daulah Islamiyah (KDI), a media unit specialising in translating ISIS materials into Bahasa (IPAC 2015). Additionally, since October 2014, *Ummati Fajrun* (not a real name, presumably a woman) has been editing and translating ISIS videos in a blog believed to be named after her.

“ Since 2014, female ISIS supporters in the region have also provided guidance on how to perform *hijrah* (emigration) to the ‘Islamic State’ in Syria. ”

Logistical and Financial Support

Jihadi ideologues and leaders have relied on women to raise funds for jihad. Female jihadists often partner with their husbands to provide logistical and financial support for jihadi groups. During the time of JI, the wives of JI leaders Hambali, Omar al-Faruq, and Yazid Sufaat played crucial roles in financing the organisation. Some even served as bookkeepers (Nelly Lahoud 2014). The trend persists in the post-JI era as the women continue to assist their husband's activities in support of pro-ISIS groups in the region.

For instance, Rosmawati partnered with her husband Hasan to manage funds and provide logistics for Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia). MIT is a terrorist group based in Poso, Central Sulawesi, that pledged allegiance to ISIS (Merdeka 2015). Raida Alsree, the wife of Sucipto Ibrahim Ali, an MIT member and one of the core leaders of Philippine's pro-ISIS group, Ansharul Khilafah Philippines (AKP), received the AKP's money via intermediaries (IPAC 2016 and The Standard 2016).

Jihadi fundraising entities such as GASHIBU [Gerakan Sehari Seribu or One Thousand Rupiah a Day (US\$0.07)] – also had several female administrators. GASHIBU is responsible for looking after the well-being of the families of terrorist inmates or those who were killed.

While the men of GASHIBU appear to remain in charge of the overall fundraising operation, women are involved in liaising with the beneficiaries (Muh Taufiqurrohman and V. Arianti 2014).

Some female jihadists also initiate fundraising efforts on their own. This is usually the case for family members of incarcerated terrorists. The funds collected are then used to cover the cost of prison visits, healthcare needs, and school fees of the inmates' families. Social media online platforms and mobile phone group chat applications enable women to raise funds by reaching out to the male jihadists, as it does not violate a literal Sharia principle restricting physical interaction with a *non mahram* across gender.

On WhatsApp platforms such as Daulah Akhir Zaman (the State of the End of Times) and Telegram platforms such as Peduli Keluarga Mujahidin dan Aseer (Care for the Families of Mujahedeen and Prisoners), women increasingly initiate and coordinate fundraising for families of the incarcerated. They post messages asking for donations, disclosing the names of their families and other jihadist families along with the amount of the money needed to pay for their medical or living expenses.

The women's fundraising initiative can be seen on several Facebook as well as Whatsapp accounts and groups. For instance, a relative of a terrorist inmate, Sigit Indrajid, is active in raising funds for other terrorist inmates and their families. Sigit Indrajid was involved in the foiled Myanmar Embassy bombing in Jakarta in May 2013. Besides the convenience of raising funds via group chat applications such as Telegram, WhatsApp and BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), women have turned to independent fundraising. This is due to the limited amount of donations provided by the established jihadi fundraising groups, amid the rising number of eligible beneficiaries. Further arrests and an increase in the number of incarcerated terrorists usually spur more demands for financial assistance. Additionally, some female jihadi activists also contribute financially. Tasmina Salsabila for instance, donated Rp 8 million (US\$615) to buy arms, ammunitions and bomb making materials to a 'Katibah al Iman' cell led by Abu Jundi. She sent the money from her salary to Abu Jundi through her husband, Zainal Akbar who is now in police custody for planning an attack on the Shia community in Java and Riau.

“ While female jihadists played more passive and supportive roles during the late 1990s to 2009, when JI was operationally active, they are currently directly involved in terrorist recruitment, ideological training and fundraising. ”

Conclusion

While women jihadists played more passive and supportive roles in the past, today they are directly involved in terrorist recruitment, ideological training and fundraising. This is especially so in the online world as terrorist groups in Southeast Asia exploit new media technologies and open their virtual doors to their female members.

The expanding role of women in jihadi activism calls for a better understanding of the factors driving the radicalisation of women in and from Southeast Asia. Such a research focus will complement strategies for better approaches in counter-terrorism, counter-ideology and community engagement efforts targeted at women. This is imperative in the overall protracted fight against terrorism today.

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The Abu Sayyaf-ISIS Nexus: Rising Extremism and its Implications for Malaysia

Laura Steckman

Abu Sayyaf, a group affiliated with the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), has recently gained traction in East Malaysia's Sarawak and Sabah states. Recent trends there, including the growth in ISIS sympathisers, clearly show that ISIS is seeking to make inroads in the country through the existing local militant groups.

Introduction

East Malaysia is facing a threat from the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS' influence in particular has penetrated East Malaysia's Sarawak and Sabah states. Recent activity in Sarawak and, more critically, in Sabah, fundamentally suggests that pro-ISIS groups and sympathisers in these states are seeking to promote violence and to facilitate radicalisation.

With ISIS slowly losing territory in the Middle East, the group appears to be setting its sights on other regions, including Southeast Asia. The current threat to East Malaysia stems from a growing number of ISIS sympathisers as well as members from the ISIS-affiliated Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). ASG is a small separatist outfit located in southern Philippines that has resorted to violent criminal acts like kidnapping, bombing attacks and beheadings. It poses the most immediate threat to East Malaysia. ASG has ties to Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and prior to late 2014, claimed links to Al Qaeda. JI's expressed objective was to create an Islamic caliphate across the archipelago (*nusantara*), comprising Malaysia, Indonesia, and southern Philippines. One report suggests that there are at least 50,000 ISIS sympathisers in Malaysia (Malaysiakini 2015). Although this figure is not so significant, as it makes up less than 0.5 percent of the nation's population, it is nevertheless worrying.

This is because there is general discontentment towards the government in the face of an underperforming economy, corruption, rising immigration rates, and a long-standing desire by segments of the Muslim population, notably members and supporters of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), to establish alternative versions of an Islamic state ruled under Islamic law (*sharia*) (Thomas 2005).

Threat to Sarawak State

Pro-ISIS sympathisers in Sarawak have publicly supported ISIS in the virtual realm. Officials from Sarawak's state-level Special Branch Counter Terrorism Division revealed that after the Jakarta attacks in January 2016, it had identified and stopped multiple attempts to import extremist ideology into the state (Malay Mail 2016). While officials did not divulge details on these said attempts, online support for ISIS in Sarawak continues to exist at low-levels since the group declared the establishment of its so-called caliphate in June 2014.

Local pro-ISIS elements, embracing ISIS' practice of excommunication (*takfirism*), emerged shortly in Sarawak after ISIS declared its so-called caliphate. In August 2014, a group proclaiming itself Jemaah ISIS Malaysia (JIM) set up a Facebook page urging ISIS supporters to target and kill Sarawak and Sabah's non-Muslim population. The page called for the slaughtering of Dayaks, who are natives of Borneo Island, and charges the Dayaks' for being apostates (Mangor 2014). Despite such calls, no related acts of violence occurred and JIM's Facebook page was shut soon after.

Sarawak has an effective physical defence of its border with Indonesia. It is the designated host for the 31st Border Brigade, a five battalion Army post in Bintulu designed to provide additional security on the nation's borders with Indonesian Borneo. The Malaysian Armed Forces and the Indonesian National Armed Forces are cooperating in joint efforts to counter terrorism and criminal transnational networks (Brunei Times 2016). In 2016, Sarawak expanded such joint efforts due to concerns over terrorist attacks by ISIS.

“ Local pro-ISIS elements, embracing ISIS' practice of excommunicating the non-believers (*takfiri*) emerged shortly in Sarawak after ISIS declared its establishment of the so-called caliphate. ”

Threat in Sabah State

Sabah's situation differs from Sarawak in terms of known ISIS supporters. At the end of 2014, no Sabahan was reported to have travelled to Iraq and Syria or arrested for terrorism. By May 2015, however, security forces captured six Sabahans in the peninsula with suspected ties with ISIS (Daily Express 2015). In late January 2016, a multi-state security sweep led to the arrest of a small ISIS cell headed by a Sabahan man working in Johor (Malay Mail 2016). The cell allegedly planned to replicate the Jakarta attacks of January 2016 in Kuala Lumpur. Shortly after, the Katibah Nusantara ISIS' Malay-speaking combat brigade founded in Syria in September 2014, released a video claiming that the group would avenge its arrested "brethren." There have been no Sarawakians reported among ISIS' ranks. Sabah's proximity to the Philippines indicates the likelihood that Filipino insurgent movements and terrorist networks may seek support from the Malaysian locals.

Sabah's relationship to the Philippines is complex as the Philippines have an unresolved claim on it. Over the years, occasional efforts to wrest the state away from Malaysia occurred without success, including an effort in the 1960s to wage small-scale guerrilla warfare to force the

population to secede (Vitug and Gloria 2013). In 2013, Jamalul Kiram, the then Sultan of Sulu, supported a force of 200 troops to retake the territory (Sydney Morning Herald 2013). These events failed to gain the support from the masses but succeeded in opening up spaces for anti-Malaysian elements to operate within Sabah.

Terrorist and insurgent groups exploit relationships and tensions between Sabah and the Philippines to achieve their goals. One example is the Sabah-based Knights of the Right Keepers (KotRK) founded as the Greek fraternity Kappa Rho Kappa (KRK) in the 1970s. Later, it forged ties with ASG in the Philippines (Kinabalu Today 2015). The KotRK provides ASG with an extensive intelligence-collection network. In addition to the KotRK, ASG allegedly has some sympathetic locals in Sabah working as spies, including a presence in Sabah's state capital Kota Kinabalu.

KotRK members and the local spies identify foreign tourists as potential targets and relay information about their destinations and lengths of stay to the ASG (Malaysian Digest 2015). Because of ASG's affiliation with ISIS, the Sabah-based individuals and groups supporting ASG indirectly aid ISIS and spread its message in the region; ASG spies perform reconnaissance and surveillance, identify economically-beneficial targets, and enable other criminal activities. They also volunteer to become suicide bombers and plan operations under the guise of ISIS' black flag, all of which benefit the extremists' cause.

ISIS-ASG Links: Implications for Malaysia

Since declaring fealty (*bai'at*) to ISIS in 2014, ASG has kidnapped a number of Malaysian citizens. In May 2015, ASG kidnapped a Malaysian national Bernard Then and Thien Nyuk Fun from a restaurant in Sabah and beheaded Bernard Then in November 2015 after ransom negotiations failed (BBC 2016). The restaurant manager Thien, was however, released after her ransom was paid (Sun Daily 2015).

ISIS' first claimed attack on Jakarta, which occurred in January 2016, underscore the magnitude of the threat posed by ISIS to Southeast Asian countries. The perpetrators revealed that Malaysian extremists received money and weapons from Bahrun Naim, the leader of Katibah Nusantara, and plans to attack

“ The Malaysian Armed Forces and the Indonesian National Armed Forces are cooperating in joint efforts to counter terrorism and criminal transnational networks. In 2016, Sarawak expanded such joint efforts... ”

Kuala Lumpur were underway (Sin Chew 2016). Kidnapping attempts by ASG intensified even more after the Jakarta attacks. Three major incidents took place within a three-week period. In March 2016, ASG captured 10 Indonesian crew members; in April 2016, the group took four men from Sarawak hostage and created a Facebook page to announce their capture; a week later, there was a third kidnapping on the high seas (The Star 2016). These incidents prompted officials to close the Sabah-Philippines border and introduce strict maritime measures (Sabahanews 2016). ASG's recent actions in Sabah emphasise the extent of ISIS' traction there.

In the past, ASG procured weapons in the Philippines and exported them to regionally-based extremist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah. Prior to 2011, the Kaltim Group, also known as the Abu Omar network, transported weapons and other illegal contraband, by sea and over land, across Borneo Island, which is shared by Sabah and Sarawak, Indonesian Kalimantan and Brunei. The group often used Tawau, Sabah, as a transshipment point and then facilitated clandestine shipping across Indonesia's Kalimantan provinces (JPNN 2011).

The network started to crumble after its leader Abu Omar was arrested in 2011 and its remaining group members were apprehended (Ibnuhasyim 2011). Kaltim Group members travelled through Sabah and continued to operate up till 2013 (Jakarta Post 2013). As ASG continues to maintain its foothold in eastern Sabah and North Kalimantan, there is a high probability that ASG along with other pro-ISIS supporters have also co-opted remnants of the Kaltim Group network in Sabah and continue to use it (Kompas 2016).

ASG has long-standing Malaysian connections, especially to Malaysian bomb makers and other associates. Noordin Top, a Malaysian bomb-maker and a JI senior operative, had extensive ties with Al Qaeda, also shared ties with the ASG.

In December 2015, Mohammad Najib Hussein, also known as Abu Anas, a Malaysian expert bomb-maker and a suspected ASG member was reported to have died during a confrontation with the Philippines' police in Basilan (Wartaperang 2016). Evidence of Malaysian nationals associated with pro-ISIS elements in southern Philippines and being involved in cross-border pro-ISIS training and operations constitutes a real and present danger (UCAnews 2016).

In November 2015, Malaysian police confirmed that ASG hosted a summit in Sulu to unite ASG, ISIS, and the Moro National Liberation Front leadership in a bid to consolidate its resistance against the Malaysian state. According to reports, the summit established plans to attract more recruits and to train suicide bombers. It was revealed that suicide bombers had been stationed near Kuala Lumpur and in Sabah (Straits Times 2015). United, and equipped with an understanding of the local and regional context, ISIS has embedded itself within the local regional militant groups and formed a three-pronged menace, to Malaysia, Philippines and the wider Southeast Asian region.

The link between ASG and ISIS has grown stronger as ASG has proven itself capable of recruiting, training, and initiating operations in Malaysia and the Philippines. In February 2016, ISIS' al-Furat media released a video acknowledging ASG's pledge of allegiance (Manila Standard 2016). With ISIS' endorsement, the increasing frequency of hostage-taking for financing, and the April 2016 conflict in Basilan,

“ As Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) continues to maintain its foothold in eastern Sabah and North Kalimantan, there is a high probability that ASG along with other pro-ISIS supporters have also co-opted remnants of the Kaltim Group network in Sabah... ”

an insular province in the southern Philippines, which claimed the lives of 18 Filipino soldiers, ASG has continued to escalate its criminal and terrorist operations. As ties between ISIS and ASG grow tighter, ASG poses an even greater threat, one that will intensify if ASG allies with and spreads ISIS' support to currently non-ISIS-affiliated terrorist networks in Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

Since mid-2014, Malaysians have been apprehended in the country for supporting terrorist activities within Malaysia. In Malaysia, ISIS is gaining traction in Sarawak and Sabah. Increased vigilance internally, and greater cooperation with international partners, such as the Philippines' government and with the ASEAN countries, would be paramount.

East Malaysia will need culturally-appropriate de-radicalisation programmes, along with carefully crafted messaging, to reach the region's different ethnic populations. With the US' assistance, counter-terrorism strategies must address those who already espouse extremism as well as deter

any potential recruitment base. Online counter-narratives must be developed to prevent the spread of the pro-militant jihad, pro-Nusantara caliphate narratives propagated by either ISIS or ASG.

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The Emerging *Wilayat* in the Philippines

Rohan Gunaratna

Militant groups in southern Philippines are among the more than 30 groups in Southeast Asia that have pledged allegiance to the self-declared Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS has capitalised on the ongoing instability in the south and proclaimed an 'IS Philippines'. With an increased likelihood of ISIS declaring a Wilayat in the Philippines, the government must place greater priority on fighting ISIS and increasing cooperation with Southeast Asian counterparts.

Introduction

Plans by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to declare a *Wilayat* (province or a governorate) of the so-called Caliphate in Southeast Asia underline the threat posed by the group to the region. ISIS' influence is undoubtedly growing in the region and this is most evident in the Philippines due to the prevalent instability there. The presence of ISIS and its myriad support groups have resulted in open confrontation between the militants and the security forces of the Philippines (Gunaratna 2016).

ISIS had been planning to declare its first *Wilayat* in Indonesia since 2015, but its plans were pre-empted. A timely deployment of Detachment 88 (Indonesia's special counter-terrorism force) and the Indonesian military (TNI) in Poso, eastern Indonesia, managed to frustrate the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT)'s designs (Chan 2016). With the deterioration of the security situation in southern Philippines, an opportunity has arisen for ISIS to declare a *Wilayat* in the Philippines. The former deputy leader of Al Harkatul al Islamiyah (Abu Sayyaf Group), Isnilon Hapilon alias Abu Abdullah, has been designated as ISIS' leader in southern Philippines. Although no *Wilayat* has been declared as yet, ISIS Central refers to Hapilon's group as the 'Islamic State, Philippines' (Liljas 2016).

It is clear that ISIS' influence is increasing among well-established Filipino groups that have hitherto supported Al Qaeda (AQ). ISIS videos have impressed the fighters of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). As many ASG fighters admire ISIS, ASG, which is led by Radulan Sahiron, is facing the threat of further fractionalisation.

The Context

The threat from ISIS in Southeast Asia has heightened, with over 30 groups pledging allegiance to the self-proclaimed Caliph, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (The Straits Times 2016). These groups are gaining in strength, size and influence in the region and are seeking to emulate ISIS Central.

In May 2016, ISIS' official media, Al-Barakah Media Office, released a 15-minute video titled "Generation of Battles" featuring Indonesian and Malaysian fighters. The first three minutes of the video (in Arabic with Bahasa subtitles) introduces the Nusantara (the Malay archipelago) and how it has been "the object of the infidels' conquest that has corrupted Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines and others." Included in the video are photos of the Sultan of Brunei and President of Indonesia, Jokowi; a meeting between U.S. President Obama and ASEAN leaders; Muslims, including the spiritual head of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Abu Bakar Ba'asyir being detained by police; and the Bali bombers (Zelin 2016).

More than any other country in Southeast Asia, ISIS' influence in the Philippines runs deep. It has gained a foothold with IS Philippines' control of the territory in Basilan, southern Philippines. ISIS' inroads into the Philippines present a threat to both the stability and security of the Philippines and the region. The group's influence has been steadily growing in northern, southern and western Mindanao. The official ISIS branch in the Philippines is IS Philippines, which is the most significant of the ISIS entities. It consists of Hapilon's Basilan-based former ASG members, as well as foreign fighters. Hapilon unified both Ansar Khilafa Philippines (led by Tokboy), and Jund al Tawhid (led by a Malaysian, Amin Baco) (Weiss 2016).

Mohammad Najib bin Hussein alias Abu Anas Al-Muhajir, another Malaysian, led the Ansar Al-Shariah Battalion until he was killed on 15 December 2015. After his death, IS Philippines

“ ISIS' inroads into the Philippines present a threat both to the stability and security of the Philippines and the region. ”

released a video of Najib beheading a Filipino civilian. Two other ISIS support groups are; Ma'rakah Al-Ansar Battalion (led by Abu Ammar), and Abu Dujana Battalion. Previously a competing faction, Islamic State Lanao, located in northern Mindanao, has also pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. However, ISIS Central has not yet accepted the pledge of allegiance.

Northern Mindanao

In northern Mindanao, Tawhid al Jihad has rebranded itself as the Islamic State of Lanao in Butig. Although ISIS Central has not yet acknowledged the Butig-based group as its official branch, the group presents a major threat. It has engaged in several confrontations with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and is currently holding several civilian hostages (Gunaratna 2016).

One of the key leaders who operated in northern Mindanao was Zulkifli bin Abdul Hir alias Marwan, the Malaysian leader who brought together fighters from different groups. They included members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front – Special Operations Group (MILF-SOG), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, Abu Sayyaf Group and Rajah Solaiman Revolutionary Movement. Opposed to the Philippine government-MILF negotiations, Marwan and his successor, an Afghan trained Filipino, Ustadz Humam Abdul Najid, promoted the idea of a caliphate and used Al Qaeda's version of the black flag.

The current leader, Abdullah Maute, uses ISIS' version of the black flag. According to Thomas Koruth Samuel, "Najid was responsible for numerous terrorist attacks and bombings in the

Philippines, including; the bombing of the Rural Bus Transit in Zamboanga City on 16 August 2012, the bombing of the Maxandrea Hotel in Cagayan de Oro City on 11 October 2012, and the bombing of a Pension House in Iligan City on 24 December 2012” (Samuel 2016).

The Lanao del Sur-based ISIS group released a video of a drone it allegedly shot down, and a fighter greeting his counterparts in the country and in IS “provinces”. The 10-minute video, entitled, “Allah is the Best of Those who Plot,” was produced by Ala al-Haqq Madhoun Media Foundation, and was posted on Telegram on 11 May 2016. The Arabic-speaking fighter is identified as Abu Hafs al-Mashriqi who calls on Muslims to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. The fighter is seen in the video translated by SITE Intelligence Group declaring:

“And we say to our brothers in the group of Abu Abdullah in Sulu, and the group of Ustadh Ismail in Mindanao, and the group of Ansar al-Khilafah: By Allah, we love you in Allah, and we received the glad tidings of your victory. So may you be rewarded on behalf of Islam. We give you the glad tidings, and unto Allah is all praise and gratitude, that your brothers in Ranao [Lanao] are moving forth on the path, and we will not turn from it or rest, no matter how long the road and no matter how arduous it is and no matter how much the affliction.”

Southern Mindanao

In southern Mindanao, Ansar Khilafa Philippines (AKP) operates both in Sarangani and Sultan Kudarat provinces. AKP pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi on 12 September 2014 (Weiss 2016). Previously, it was known as Ansar Khalifah Sarangani or Jemaah Islamiyyah Philippines. As a result of ISIS’ influence, AKP killed two Shi’ites in Luzon, fought with the AFP and conducted ISIS-style beheadings. The group is led by Mohammad Jaafar Sabiwang Maguid alias Tokboy. Tokboy has expertise in handling Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and staging attacks in urban terrains.

AKP hosted Indonesian instructor Ibrahim Ali Sucipto, who was killed in Palembang, Sultan Kudarat, on 26 November 2015, along with seven others; Tokboy and his members managed to escape. Sucipto alias Ibrahim Ali masterminded the transfer of weapons to Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), led by Santoso. Philippines and Indonesian authorities

“ In northern Mindanao, Tawhid al Jihad has rebranded itself as Islamic State of Lanao in Butiq... in southern Mindanao, Ansar Khilafa Philippines (AKP) pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi on 12 September 2014.”

monitored AKP’s procurement and movement of high-powered firearms to MIT and collaborated to disrupt the arms flow across the Sulu Sea. Sucipto, an Indonesian national, was a former leader of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Mindanao. An IED instructor, Sucipto was originally with Majlis Mujahideen Indonesia (MMI) but later joined JI, JAT and MIT. JI led to MMI and JAT emerged from MMI. In 2003, when ASG and JI were in Curuan, Zamboanga City, Sucipto used a wire to kill a civilian from Zamboanga whom they suspected of spying on the group.

A foreign fighter, Sucipto was arrested in Zamboanga Port for illegal possession of firearms in 2003, but was released by a court in 2013. He should have been deported to Indonesia, but moved to the south and linked up with AKP.

At the time when the marines raided its terrorist camp, AKP’s focus was recruitment and training – it was planning to recruit 300 to 400 fighters. According to documents recovered, AKP believed that it was guerrilla warfare that led to the downfall of AQ and neo-AQ. AKP’s plans were to launch attacks, capture territory, establish “Islamiyah Military camps,” institute training in explosives, conduct *dakwah* through

AKP Media to raise awareness and knowledge of the Caliphate, and implement Shariah. Unlike other groups, AKP wanted to conduct suicide attacks and considered martyrdom as the highest form of jihad. They also believed that bombings, especially suicide bombings, beheadings, and ambushes are ways to terrorise the enemies of Islam.

While MIT is the first group in Indonesia to pledge allegiance to ISIS, AKP is the first significant group in the Philippines to pledge allegiance to ISIS. With the Indonesian police and military mounting pressure on MIT, Santoso considered southern Philippines as a back up base for ISIS support groups in Indonesia. Mustaqim, who was head of JI in the Philippines and now Indonesia, is the coordinator – including financial facilitator – between MIT and AKP. He succeeded Nasir Abbas as head of JI in the Philippines (1990s to 2000s) and was later replaced by Ahmad Faisal bin Iman Sarijan alias Zulkifli. Both Zulkifli and Sucipto were detained in Muntinlupa jail. Zulkifli is now in Bicutan SICA jail where he and Sucipto's local wife, Raida Halipa Alsree kept in contact. She disbursed funds received from Indonesia to AKP. After AKP joined the Islamic State (IS) Philippines, led by Hapilon, the group suffered another setback after police raided their camp in April 2016 (Update.PH 2016). The group, which operates in the SOCSARGEN area (South Cotabato, Sarangani and General Santos) was targeted by the Philippines Government because Tokboy and his fighters had pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and joined IS Philippines. During the raid, Tokboy and his members engaged the security forces in a brief firefight. Tokboy and some of his followers managed to escape, but two of them were fatally wounded.

Seized at the site of the encounter were the following:

1. Two units of Carbine rifles without serial numbers;
2. One (homemade) caliber .50 rifle without serial number;
3. One "Black Flag";
4. Two pieces of RPGs;
5. Two pieces of 60 mm mortar rounds;
6. One IED fashioned in a 60 mm mortar round;
7. Four pieces of caliber .50 live

“ With Indonesian police and military mounting pressure on MIT, Santoso considered southern Philippines as a back up base for ISIS support groups in Indonesia.”

ammunitions;

8. 134 rounds of caliber .30 live ammunitions;
9. Assorted IED making components;
10. Assorted AnsarAl-Khalifa Philippines T-shirts/uniforms;
11. AKP documents, including extortion letters.

The police also recovered a publication entitled; “The Book on Jihad” translated into the Filipino language and titled *Ang Aklat Ng Jihad*. Originally in Arabic and titled *Mashariul Ashwaq Ila Masa-Riul Ushaq Wa Muthir Al-Ghuram Ila Dar Assalam*, the book seeks to justify AKP's actions against the “enemies of Islam.”

Authored by Abu Zakariyyah Al-Damashqi Al-Dimyati, also known as Ibnu Nuhas, the book was described by the jihadist ideologue Dr. Abdullah Azzam as “The best written book on Jihad”. It was translated into Filipino by Abu Abdullah Al-Ghareeb, the leader of the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM) – a Muslim convert group engaged in terrorism. Currently in prison in Bicutan, the RSM members, including its leader Ahmed Santos, also pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.

Western Mindanao

The most significant battle by a group associated with ISIS in Southeast Asia was mounted in the island of Basilan, Philippines, on 9 April 2016 (Gunaratna 2016). Although the Government of

the Philippines did not acknowledge the incident as a fight between government forces and ISIS, the group that fought the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) was actually led by Hapilon. The counter-offensive led to the killing of 18 AFP members and injuring of 53 others, a significant setback for the government. The former ASG members, based in Basilan and led by Hapilon, pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in 2015, and joined forces with other groups associated with ISIS. Although the AFP and the government in Manila continue to refer to the Basilan group as “ASG”, it is no longer the case. ISIS has taken root and the recent encounter demonstrated its resiliency.

With 125 men led by Hapilon, the newly created ISIS nucleus demonstrated that they can hold ground and fight AFP. The ferocious exchange and the resulting casualties raise questions about the strength of the AFP to dismantle an emerging threat to the Philippines and the region. In the wake of recent successes, ISIS is likely to declare a *Wilayat* in the Sulu Archipelago shortly.

Exploiting the victory in Basilan, ISIS’ official propaganda organ, *Al Naba*, released an article titled “Killing 300 Crusaders from the Philippine Army During Their Recent Campaign on Positions of Soldiers of the Caliphate”. In the article, ISIS provided its own version of the story, stating that, unlike its predecessors, ASG, ISIS’ fighters are “closer to the land of conflict” and are “more capable” to fulfil what their past leaders had promised.

Al Naba grossly exaggerated the number of Filipino troops killed by over ten times. It also chronicled events that led to the battle, the battle itself, and its aftermath, adding that “soldiers of the Caliphate demonstrated steadfastness, patience, firmness, and trust in Allah, sacrificing their lives in the cause of Allah to achieve empowerment in His land and implementation of His Shariah” (SITE Intelligence Group).

Conclusion

Given the military pressure ISIS is facing in Iraq and Syria, it may declare a *Wilayat* in Southeast Asia (and elsewhere) to distract attention from its military setbacks and to boost the morale of its fighters and supporters. The establishment of any *Wilayat* in the Philippines will raise the threat level in the region. ISIS training camps will lure extremists in and outside Southeast Asia, and its

“ The most significant battle by a group associated with ISIS in Southeast Asia was mounted in the island of Basilan, Philippines on 9 April 2016. ”

fighters will attempt to expand its area of control and influence, and be emboldened to mount terrorist attacks and clash with security forces.

If the Philippines is determined to prevent ISIS’ rise in Mindanao with implications for Southeast Asia, it should take the threat seriously, and dismantle ISIS entities on its soil. Rather than denying ISIS’ existence, the Malacanang should make fighting ISIS their national security priority and step up cooperation with their counterparts in Southeast Asia to contain, isolate and eliminate the threat.

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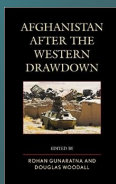
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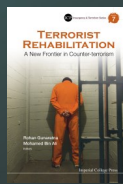


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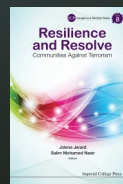
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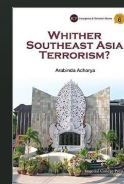
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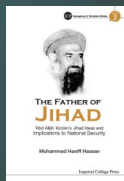
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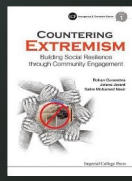
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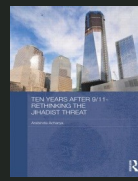
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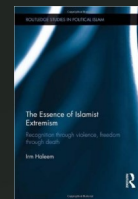
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