

# ISIS, INDONESIAN MUSLIMS AND GLOBAL TERRORISM: A REFLECTION

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**Abstract:** The emergence of ISIL or ISIS, the Sunni militia, has shocked the Muslim World, including Indonesia. ISIS is the ultra jihadist for global terrorism. ISIS is also a translation from the Arabic, *Ad-Daulah Islamiyah fi al-Iraq wa Ash-Sham*. Some call it as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which specifically has a different coverage area. The term includes the Sham or the Levant region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates River that the country coverage includes Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel. The term Syria confined to the state of modern Syria that is currently in conflict. In this case, the involvement of hundreds Indonesians in the ISIS in the Middle East region is not new because previously, there is a precedent that some Indonesian citizens in the past had involvement in conflicts abroad when US President Jimmy Carter used the CIA to weaken the power of the Soviets in Afghanistan. In responding the ISIS networkers and followers in Indonesia, the Jakarta government and Muslim organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) dan Muhammadiyah have launched action and campaign for pluralism, peace, non-violence and civil Islam. The campaign by NU and Muhammadiyah for an open-minded and pluralistic Islam also comes in a time

when Islam is at war with itself over central theological questions about how the faith defined in the modern era.

**Keywords:** ISIS, Daulah Islamiyah, Muslims, Caliphate, Indonesia, Middle East.

A striking phenomenon of hundreds of Indonesians, who were actively involved in the political dynamics of the Islamic world and joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which declared itself as an Islamic Caliphate in June 28, 2014, shocks the public and government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) in Indonesia. Since early 2013, ISIS has successfully consolidated various radical groups in conflict with one another to divert the target: to control the region of eastern Syria and western Iraq which cannot be maintained effectively by the government of Damascus and Baghdad.

The fall of Mosul with population of about 2 million people into the hands of ISIS, has been so severely bowed to Baghdad. Thousands of resident—especially the minorities and Shi'ite communities—out of Mosul, the provincial capital of Nineveh, look for survival.

ISIS army takes-over government buildings, oil wells, military bases, arsenals, and banks. ISIS, which claims to be the only *Daulah Islamiyah fil Iraq war ash-Sham*, has three main principles of the struggle, among others: *First*, establish monotheism; *second*, destroy polytheism and idolatrousness; and, *third*, enforce the law of God by force of arms. With these three principles, ISIS joins forces to exploit sentiments

of Sunni versus Shi'ite sectarianism and caliphate as a political entity unifying Muslims worldwide. They also called on the Muslim world, including Indonesia, to support and join it. With the three principles of struggle above, ISIS destroyed many mosques and holy places that are considered as a place of worship that could lead to polytheism and contrary to the creed of monotheism.

In this case, the involvement of some Indonesians in the ISIS in the Middle East region is not new because previously, there is precedent that some Indonesian citizens in the past had involvement in conflicts abroad when President Jimmy Carter used the CIA to weaken the power of the Soviets in Afghanistan, with fighters from all over the world mobilized, including not less 350 people from Indonesia, and Osama bin Laden himself from Saudi Arabia to destroy the Russian communists.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, we have had precedent on Indonesian involvement in armed actions since 1985, in which it can be found early in the war of Afghanistan and the conflict in Pakistan. In the past, a number of Indonesian citizens were also reported military training in Libya. Back to the country, among them become the actors of violence and terror that has been rife since the early 2000s.

Although ISIS has a variety of social networks in Indonesia, it failed to recruit Indonesian Muslims in large

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<sup>1</sup> John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, London: Pluto Press, 2002.

numbers to support their actions and goals. ISIS failed to persuade these groups to encourage intolerance and radicalization that can quickly be terrorism in the country.

Our deeper question is: Is this because ISIS supports the sentiments which tend to be universal *ummah* or domestic situation in Indonesia that is still conducive to the flowering of radical Muslim, understood as a form of state failure and civil society that provide an alternative discourse to the narrative of their violence? Or, are local and international factors equally dominant?<sup>2</sup>

### **Genealogy of ISIS**

The fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq's Shi'ite regime spawned to not give place to the Sunnis. The failure of Iraqi leaders, including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in building an inclusive political system, has given ways to grow militants across Iraq, including the Sunnis, in turn, gave birth to ISIS. Sunni militants protested the economic and political marginalization by the ruling Shi'ite. Supports given by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to the hardline oppositions in Syria also contributed to the birth of ISIS.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Noor Huda Ismail, "'NIIS Indonesia dan Evolusi Teror Mondial,'" Kompas daily, 7 August 2014. See also, Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

<sup>3</sup>Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014, p. 6.

Of course, the presence of ISIS, which originated from the Sunni, has shocked the Muslim World, including Indonesia. Some call it as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).<sup>4</sup> There is also a call Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which specifically has a different coverage area. The term includes the Sham or the Levant region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates River means that the country coverage includes Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel. The term Syria is confined to the state of modern Syria that is currently in conflict.

The genealogy of this radical religious organization can be traced to the Salafi Jihadist movement who has been fighting in Iraq and Syria that are on a mission to the formation of *Daulah Islamiyah* (Islamic State). ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), according to Zana Khasraw Gulmohamad of the University of Sheffield, stems from the birth of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in 2003. The initial declaration of the *Daulah Islamiyah* organization that conducted the insurgents in Iraq group is established by az-Zarqawi in 2004 who eventually reveals himself as part of al Qaeda.

After Az-Zarqawi was killed in battle against the army of the United States in mid-2006, AQI was established by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi from Jordan, who in 2006 was murdered by the United States. He was replaced by Abu Ayyoub al-Masri, Egyptian origin, who supports the

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<sup>4</sup>*Elmihwar*, newspaper, Egypt (6/8/2014).

formation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) or *Daulah Islamiyah fil Iraq*.

Helm of *Daulah Islamiyah fil Iraq* switched to Abu Hamza al-Mohajir until April 19, 2010. He was killed in an attack by American troops. The leadership then fallen into the hand of Abu Umar Al-Baghdadi for about a year. Then, that helm was transferred to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. After standing ISI, Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi known as Abu Hameed Dawood Mohammed II or Khalil al-Zawri (Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai and Abu Bakr al-Husayni al-Qureshi al-Baghdadi) makes Baquba as his headquarters. Al-Baghdadi, the Iraqi people, replaced al-Masri, killed by American troops and Iraqis.

Under the control of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, *Daulah Islamiyah fil Iraq* organization increasingly expanded its influence until April 9, 2013 when appearing a voice recording associated with the voice of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The tape was stated, Jabhah Nushra (Victory Front) in Syria is a continuation *Daulah Islamiyah* of Iraq organization. The tape also described that the name Jabhah Nushrah and *Daulah Islamiyah fil Iraq* be removed, and later proclaimed *Daulah Islamiyah fil Iraq wa ash-Sham*, that is written by media as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as his successor, while Raqqa city

located in Syria, which borders with Turkey, as its capital.<sup>5</sup>

In 2012, al-Baghdadi sent his men to form a branch of al Qaeda Syria, named Jabhah al-Nusra. The group aims to get rid of President Bashar al-Assad and establish a Sunni Islamic state led by Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, a Salafist-oriented leader. According to the Australian National Security, they received funding and support from AQI and ISI. However, they subject to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of Al Qaeda.

Al-Baghdadi who wants to be a single leader, in 8 April 2003 through a decree stating that AQI and Jabhah al-Nusra turned into ISIS/ISIL. However, Jabhah al-Nusra rejected it. Dispute between the ISIS and Jabhah al-Nusra prolonged and failed to be mediated by Ayman al-Zawahiri that ultimately claimed that Al-Qaeda cut off ties with ISIS because ISIS has its own conception and position not subject to the Al Qaeda and Ayman Center.<sup>6</sup>

According to German radio, Deutsche Welle (DW), ISIS takes money at the Central Bank of Mosul, some 500 billion Iraqi dinars, or about 429 million dollars plus a certain amount of gold. "With that much money, they used to pay 60,000 fighters," said Eliot Higgins, a resident scholar of the UK. Currently, ISIS has estimated about 10,000-

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<sup>5</sup> "Ketua Tanfidziah PW NU Jawa Timur M. Hasan Mutawakkil Alallah: ISIS dan Perlunya Pergub", *Jawa Pos*, 9 Agustus 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Trias Kuncahyono, "Radikalisme: Genesis ISIS", *Kompas*, August 2, 2014.

armed members from different parts of the world: Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Australia, and Southeast Asia, including Indonesia.

According to the Director of the Center for Research on the Arab World at the University of Mainz, Germany, Gunter Meyer, "The most important financial source of ISIS is the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates," especially from the rich people in the country.

The motivation of initial assistance they provide, according to Meyer, is to support the ISIS to face the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. This support is encouraged "hatred" sectarian: three-quarters of the Syrian population is Sunni Muslim, but most of the ruling elite are the Alawite minority, which is often called the part of the Shia Muslims.

BBC stated that ISIS received financial support from donors in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan. It happened when they were still called Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). However, after the breakup of AQI with its central leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, and proclaimed ISIS, according to CNN and The New York Times, they rely on the financial resources of criminal acts, such as kidnapping, extortion, and robbery.

Syrian conflict is initially localized, such as demonstrations to topple the regime of Bashar al-Assad, then evolved into an international conflict, involving thousands of combatants from dozens of countries: Saudi



Arabia, Iraq, Yemen, Chechnya, Turkey, America, England, France, Germany, Sweden, Japan, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Majority of Afghan alumni in Indonesia are *tawaquf* (silent) or be very careful in giving support to the ISIS openly because of their loyalty to al Qaeda today led by Ayman al-Zawahiri. In 2013, al-Zawahiri issued a *fatwa* that ISIS is not part of Al Qaeda because ISIS has acted very brutally; thus, it damaged not only the image of Al Qaeda in Syria but also the Islam as strategic religion. Al Qaeda has had its own army, Jabhah al-Nusra, which has been first to come and help the people of Syria long before the ISIS did.<sup>7</sup>

Breaking up the partnership between the ISIS and Jabhah al-Nusra is also carried over to Indonesia. In fact, in some areas, including in the prison that housed inmate terrorists, occur fierce hostility between ISIS supporters and Jabhah al-Nusra.

In Indonesia, said Noorhuda Ismail, one of the local factors that cause people interested in joining the ISIS and even willing to die for this choice is the weak system of law enforcement, especially in prison. Massive Distribution of ISIS message in Arabic translated by Aman Abdurrahman, terrorism inmates, is done from inside the prison in reclaiming. Its visitors then disseminate this translation via the internet.

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<sup>7</sup>Noor Huda Ismail, ‘‘NIIS Indonesia dan Evolusi Teror Mondial,’’ *Kompas*, 7 Agustus 2014. Noor Huda is a founder of Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian; he is currently a PhD student in Politics and International Relations, Monash University, Australia.

Aman Abdurrahman has the record of accomplishment as terrorist that jailed twice since 2004. He was involved in Cimanggis bombing and military training in Aceh in 2010. He refused to cooperate with prison officials, as well as consistent with the *takfiri* ideology (infidelizing people outside the group), and he turns out to be the main attraction among Islamic activists who thirst the figure of the leadership.

Although there is no evidence that there is an official order from Aman Abdurrahman for his protégés to flee to Syria and join the ISIS, but through translation, writings, and sermons, it is then recycled by his followers and the media, through open discussion, marches, demonstrations, and social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube giving 'jihad' imagination beyond the nation-state concept for the readers, and then moves them to act.

What is interesting is the majority of the Afghan alumni in Indonesia has responded *tawaquf* (silent, quiet) or be very careful in giving support to the ISIS openly because their loyalty to al Qaeda, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, is stronger.

### **Responses of Indonesia**

Although the concept is not clearly relevant, the issue of ISIS caliphate makes various parties in Indonesia wary of the spread of the ISIS teachings and recruitment. Although the potential for success is relatively small, the idea and praxis of ISIS can cause serious problems in politic, religion,

and society in the country. Almost certainly, the main supporter of the caliphate of his ISIS is a radical person or a small group of radicalists who have been active in Indonesia. Responses from state and society in Indonesia to the ISIS existence in Middle East are varied. In this regard, there are some important things to get attention.

First of all, The Indonesian government, through Minister of Coordinating for Politics, Law and Security Djoko Sujanto, has submitted that ISIS is a dangerous movement to look out for, it is against Pancasila (state ideology), and not allowed to flourish in Indonesia. Even, the government also stated ISIS as a terrorist organization.

Secondly, religious leaders, Nahdlatul Ulama (a traditional Islamic Scholar organization), Muhammadiyah, and the MUI (Indonesia Ulama Council) also stated that ISIS cannot be claimed as an Islamic movement, especially Sunni, but no more than a political organization, that justifies violence. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah increase efforts to socialize the Islamic concept rahmatan lil'alamin and commitment to the Indonesian nation-state as the final form of the struggle of the Indonesian Muslims with Pancasila as the state determination, based on NU Ulama National Conference in Situbondo (1983).

There are also a number of people who propose the revocation of nationality if there are citizens who swore loyally to ISIS. This fierce response may be because Indonesia has a long experience with the issue of religious

violence and terrorism. In anticipation of the potential development of ISIS in Indonesia, however, some Ulama said, the emergence of the allegiance of loyalty to ISIS which spread in different places must be addressed with calm, not nervous, and redundant. They said that the proposed revocation of nationals (citizenship) might be considered as a form of excessive nervousness. Community groups in Indonesia, giving support to ISIS, are small. Movement cells can also be quickly uncovered.

Thirdly, its vertices do not vary much with the radical movements that have already been known. Some of the groups known, as radicalists even do not all agree with ISIS. Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Salvation Front), for example, disagreed with ISIS. Although Abu Bakar Ba'asyir as the head of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) sealed his allegiance to ISIS, but in reverse not all components of JAT agree with him including his own sons. Ngruki boarding school led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir also stated not supporting ISIS.

Fourthly, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) also disagreed with ISIS although both have ideological similarity about caliphate. It shows, in terms of support, that ISIS does not need to be too scared. Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) actually has the same understanding. They are both idealized caliphate state but have a different way in struggling it. If ISIS as done in Iraq and Syria struggled with brutal violence and indiscriminant war, HTI chooses the path of peace. However, both are anti-Pancasila and still aspiring Islam as a healing antidote. If there is a political opportunity, it is not

impossible HTI and ISIS will work together. Even the burst of a number of Indonesian citizens reportedly joined the ISIS in Syria; many Islamic organizations refuse to support the ISIS.

Allegiances to Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of ISIS will only be a momentary phenomenon that will disappear by itself. However, it can be ascertained, supporting footman's ISIS is the degree of radicalism that had reached to an end, including denying the Pancasila. Thus, ISIS issues are not excessive but still important for Indonesian to give high vigilance.

Fifthly, in the context of radical movements in Indonesia, ISIS only generates momentum for the consolidation of radical Islamic movements in Indonesia. This movement will be enlarged in Indonesia in the event of national political instability. As in his native country, ISIS grows and develops because there is political instability in Iraq and Syria. It tells how the importances of Indonesia to still maintain its political stability to ensure the country able to standing strongly to face all kinds of threats.

Additionally, supporters of ISIS in Indonesia certainly are people who think Indonesia is infidel state, in which democracy and nationalism, according to them, are a pagan system.

Sixthly, In East Java and many vulnerable provinces, in which they are potential areas for the growth of terrorism and supporting to the existing ISIS, there is an initiative of the governors which publishes 'governor rule'

(gubernatorial) in anticipation of the radical religious movements. In East Java, for instance, there is an experience for the birth of gubernatorial Number 55 Year 2012 on fostering the Guidance and Control for the Deviant of Religious activity and Misguided, which could become an interesting lesson because many benefits have been clearly perceived by the people of East Java. With the release of the regulation, as idealized together, the security forces have legitimacy to stem and anticipate any movements to develop ISIS and/or disturb the public. Many radical Muslim activists use websites and social media to spread out their information and influence to support ISIS.

In this case, on the recommendation of the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), the Ministry of Communication in 2015 blocked 19 websites it claimed to be spreading violent messages and recruiting Indonesians to join ISIS. Then the move was reversed, however, after a major public outcry, including from civil society groups often attacked by these very websites.

For the radical Muslims, this type of unthinking reaction and flip-flopping exposes a hasty and imprudent decision-making process that could undermine authority in the future, meanwhile the initial move to ban the websites sent the wrong message to civil society and mass media that saw it as a precedent of a repressive measure that could threaten freedom of speech.

Instead of arbitrarily blocking websites used as platforms to spread hateful religious sentiment, the

government has to monitor them tightly to gather evidence to prosecute them for the content that really violates the ITE Law, the way it prosecuted other ITE cases. This is important as it sends a message that it does not tolerate the spread of terrorist ideology in Indonesia, while not being seen as indiscriminately targeting websites with merely hardline perspectives.<sup>8</sup>

The authorities and the security forces aware that the Internet has been used by ISIS and other radical movements effectively to spread their ideology and lure new recruits and they know too, Pew Research Survey found that an astounding 72% of Indonesian Muslims would prefer to live under Sharia law, meanwhile The State Department details other Indonesian extremist groups in their most recent country report on terrorism from 2013. 40 separate raids led to the arrests of more than 75 suspects. One of the biggest incidents saw a planned attack on the Embassy of Burma in Jakarta thwarted. Many of the terrorist attacks were targeted at police.

### **Hundreds Indonesians Joined ISIS**

On July 2015, a video showing Indonesian pro-Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) fighters, over 70 Indonesian-

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<sup>8</sup>Devi Asmarani, "Indonesia struggles to keep citizens from joining ISIS", retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/opinion/devi-asmarani/article/indonesia-struggles-to-keep-citizens-from-joining-isis#sthash.3j0sOUJd.dpuf>

speaking men in military fatigues and armed with rifles are preparing for a field assignment. These men seem in good spirits as they smile and joke for the videographer, referring to themselves as the Ikhwan Nusantara, or the brothers of the archipelago - a reference to Indonesia as the world's largest archipelagic nation.

The videographer also introduced some of the men as he walked around, giving their names as Abu Salma, Abu Wurwah, Aman Abdurrahman. The video is strategic propaganda. It shows the Indonesians having a place, a force there. This would invite other pro-ISIS people in Indonesia to join.

The clip is the latest to show the existence of the *Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyah*, or Malay Archipelago unit for ISIS, and analysts say it is proof there is a significant number of members who have joined as fighters. The emergence of the new clip comes as officials in Indonesia are getting tough on ISIS supporters, readying charges against as many as 14 men accused of either creating a website to promote ISIS, or funding and helping ISIS supporters to travel to the Middle East to link up with the militant group Syria and the number has increased each month. Many of those who have slipped into Syria pretended to be tourists or students. Aman Abdurrahman is one of the radical Muslim figures who help the ISIS to get supports from the young Muslims in Indonesia.

In this case, Aman Abdurrahman had use his influence to Sam, a Ring Banten terror network member who served a



nine-year sentence for robbing a goldsmith to finance the first Bali bombing, visited his friend Rois Abu Syaukat in Kembang Kuning prison within the Nusakambangan prison complex. Aman Abdurrahman is a key figure in the Indonesia-Syria pipeline and he is the takfirist ideologue, who began translating ISIS tracts following its formal split from the Nusra Front in April 2013. He has been one of the most vocal advocates of ISIS from his cell at Nusakambangan prison. Aman Abdurrahman is Rois's cellmate. Shortly after the visit, Sam left for Syria.<sup>9</sup>

Julie Chernov Hwang and Noor Huda Ismail noted that Sam professed in January 2012 that he did not intend to participate in any future “actions” in Indonesia. However, he would do what he could to “help oppressed Muslims anywhere.” In addition, when Taufik Andrie, the director of the Institute for International Peace Building, met with Sam in late 2012, he found that Sam was distressed that no one was mobilizing either relief aid or jihad on behalf of the Rohingya minority in Burma. There was no mention of Syria. After meeting with Rois and Aman at Kembang Kuning in 2013, he decided to join the fight in Syria. Given that Aman is a key ISIS supporter, it is likely that he prevailed upon Sam to join ISIS. On arrival in Syria, Sam “remained in ready contact via Facebook and shared

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<sup>9</sup>Julie Chernov Hwang and Noor Huda Ismail, “There and Back Again: Indonesian Fighters in Syria”, *The Middle East Journal*, January 27, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/there-and-back-again-indonesian-fighters-syria>.

information on developments in Syria,” especially as they pertained to ISIS. Sam became a cheerleader for ISIS with Facebook postings on Syria’s “5-star jihad.” Then he was killed in Ramadi in April 2014.<sup>10</sup>

The authorities in Indonesia see all of them as one group who has divided tasks among themselves. They are in one group with a wanted terrorist, Abu Jandal, who threatened to attack the government, especially the prisons that house terrorists in Indonesia.<sup>11</sup>

We noted that of the more than 500 Indonesians that are believed to have joined ISIS, about half have gone on to fight in Syria or Iraq. Contrast this with the fact less than 200 Indonesians was estimated to have fought in Afghanistan for al-Qaeda, and since 1999, the police has arrested more than 450 terror suspects. Some of them were released after serving their sentences. These people, he said,

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<sup>10</sup>Hwang and Ismail explain that, still others are leaving directly from Indonesia, using channels similar to those operationalized during the Soviet-Afghan war. Indonesians are traveling to Malaysia and from there departing for Syria. Much like the Afghan veterans who identified themselves as Filipinos on forged passports to head to the Afghan front, Indonesians are identifying themselves as Malaysians. Interestingly, Malaysians are also departing from Indonesia to avoid attracting the attention of their own security services. Moreover, there is now a sufficient enough number of Malaysian and Indonesian fighters on the ground in Syria that, as of July 2014, there was discussion of forming a Katibah Nusantara, or a special Malay-speaking unit, of ISIS.

<sup>11</sup>*The Straits Times*, July 17, 2015.

could easily go back to their old activities unless they shifted paradigm.

In this case, radical cleric Abu Bakar Ba'asyir -- viewed as the spiritual leader of the al-Qaeda affiliate Jemaah Islamiyah -- is currently in an Indonesian prison in Java, but has declared support for ISIS. Ba'asyir has pledged allegiance to ISIS from his jail cell and is encouraging radicals to join the group. Actually, like other radicals, Indonesian extremists have even brought their families to Syria and Iraq so they could live under full Islamic law, and reported, they receive stipends for housing, food, and education and radical schools.

Our field research found that the number of Islamic State (ISIS) recruits from Indonesia tripled to over 500 by the end of last year. Home to the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia's more than 200 million Muslims make up 13% of the world's total Muslims. The nation's history of extremist movements makes it a ripe location for ISIS recruits.

Wildan Mukholland, for instance, was one of those recruits. He came from the same village in Indonesia as two militants convicted and executed for their role in the 2002 Bali terrorist bombings, which killed over 200 people and were carried out by Jemaah Islamiyah, an al-Qaeda affiliate.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>About Wildan Mukholland, see, "ISIS in Indonesia: 500 Recruits and Counting", <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/6002/isis-indonesia>. See, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/jakarta-grapples-with-indonesian-pro-isis-fighters>

Mukholland grew up admiring the two terrorists and eventually went on to join ISIS and move to the Middle East. Last year, he blew himself up in a terrorist attack in a restaurant in Baghdad. In that similar case, Afief Abdul Madjid, 63, had travelled to Syria to allegedly attend military training. He was accused of spreading violent ideology when he returned home.

He was sentenced by the court on other charges, receiving four years' jail for funding a terrorist paramilitary training camp in Aceh in 2010, less than the eight years demanded by prosecutors.

The prosecutor handling the Afief case focused on events that occurred in Syria, which were more challenging to prove, meanwhile one of the men, Muhammad Amin Mude, 41, was arrested after police said they foiled his attempt to arrange for six people with fake passports to go to Syria. Amin is alleged to have arranged the trips of three batches of travelers to Syria prior to his arrest. Another of those arrested, Muhammad Fachry (M. Fachry), is accused of setting up and running a radical website that promotes ISIS and invites people to go to Syria.

ISIS is not the only terrorist group looking for a base in Indonesia. Hamas also tried to open an office there to help manage its fundraising operations in the region, but was denied by Jakarta government.

Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country with 250 million people, practices a tolerant brand of Islam and has long eradicated terrorist networks such as the Al-

Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah, but it is now grappling with a small radical fringe that includes pro-ISIS sympathizers.

Julie Chernov Hwang and Noor Huda Ismail said that, of the approximately 8,000 foreign fighters from 74 countries believed to have joined the Syrian conflict, it is unclear how many of them are Indonesian. Official government estimates vary from a low of 24, cited by General Ansyad Mbai, the director of the National Anti-Terrorism Agency, to a high of 56, as stated by General Sutarman, the National Police commander. One Jemaah Islamiyah member stated that by his own count, some 150 fighters were in Syria with either ISIS or the Nusra Front.<sup>13</sup> Aspiring jihadist are traveling to Syria by way of four main channels. Some join with Jemaah Islamiyah as part of its humanitarian arm, Hilal Ahmar Society Indonesia (HASI), for a month-long tour providing relief and medical assistance. While on the tour, these individuals slip away. Most have joined the Nusra Front. However, when ISIS split from the Front, a portion of those fighters left for ISIS. Others have made it to Syria after performing the ‘umrah, the little hajj, taking a boat from Yemen through the Suez Canal to Latakia in Syria.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Julie Chernov Hwang and Noor Huda Ismail, “There and Back Again: Indonesian Fighters in Syria”, *The Middle East Journal*, January 27, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/there-and-back-again-indonesian-fighters-syria>.

<sup>14</sup>Australian media estimates put the number of Indonesian fighters on the ground in Syria at closer to 300. Security analysts

For the Indonesian jihadist in Syria, their experiences as volunteer fighters would enrich their struggle as the real Muslims in the arena of global conflict in which they can meet, communicate and exchange of ideas each other with the volunteer Jihadist from European Union, Africa, the US and so forth. These historical experiences have been their pride as the global Muslim Jihadist in the context of the struggle for the real in the battle for God, to borrow 'Karen Armstrong's political metaphor'.

According to Julie Chernov Hwang and Noor Huda Ismail, among others, most notably alumni of the Al Mukmim Islamic boarding school in Ngruki near Solo, have used Facebook to connect with fellow alums studying in the Middle East. Nine alumni of Al Mukmim, also known as Ngruki, have been documented as having joined the fight, leaving from boarding schools in Yemen and Pakistan, where they had been doing follow-up study.<sup>15</sup> Several were attending Al Iman, a boarding school in Sana, Yemen. Al Iman has been especially vocal in its support for Sunni fighters in Syria and thus provided the necessary conduits to travel there. These fighters connected other Al Mukmim alumni to contacts in Syrian militant groups. By way of the

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believe that official government estimates are understating the number of Indonesian fighters, while Australian estimates are overstating the number.

<sup>15</sup>Indonesians and the Syrian Conflict," Institute for the Policy Analysis of Conflict, *IPAC Report 6*, January 30, 2014, retrieved from [http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2014/01/IPAC\\_Indonesians\\_the\\_Syrian\\_Conflict.pdf](http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2014/01/IPAC_Indonesians_the_Syrian_Conflict.pdf)

connection and networking the militant groups, there open the door to go Syria/Iraq.

Based on our interview with one of the returnees from Syria, the Indonesian jihadist are very confident that by joining ISIS in Syria or Iraq, they will get blessing by Allah and, even, they will be paid with high salary more than enough compared with their monthly salary in Indonesia as the cheap laborers as far as they get here. At least, they will get what the so-called "a shortcut to heaven" as the jihadist if they killed or die in the battleground.

As far as we know, the Indonesian Jihadist go to Syria through Turkey because Indonesian citizens are eligible for a visa-on-arrival in the country, meanwhile the other country like Iraq or Jordan is more strict and difficult to give a visa.

Hwang and Ismail found that, there are two major routes that Indonesians tend to take when traveling to Syria to join ISIS or Jabhah al-Nusra. Most typically, they cross through Turkey since Indonesian citizens are eligible for a visa-on-arrival. One common route is to fly from Jakarta to Istanbul and then travel over land to Reyhanli, a town near Turkey's border with Syria. From there, arrangements are made to cross the Syrian border. Others have taken a more indirect route, traveling from Indonesia to Malaysia and then departing from Kuala Lumpur, often with Malaysian identity papers, to Doha, Qatar. They then travel to Istanbul and finally go by land to Reyhanli. In December 2014, Malaysian authorities caught some two dozen Indonesians attempting to go to Syria via this latter route. In the press/media, this

story spread out among the radical Muslims in Indonesia who are interested to join ISIS, and this stimulate them to make the contacts with their networking and radicals cell in the spirit of jihadist for ISIS.

In this case, as many as 16 Indonesian citizens are reported to have gone missing in Turkey while they were vacationing. The 16 missing individuals left Indonesia using a travel agency and their whereabouts remain unknown. They are suspected to have fled outside of Turkey to join the notoriously known radical group, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). A number of rumors led to the speculation that these individuals have deliberately gone missing as they travelled across the border to join the notoriously known radical group ISIS. Reports said, it is a very likely possibility knowing that Turkey is located next to Iraq and Syria, the two countries where most of the radical group is resides.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the Indonesian workers who went to do 'umrah' to Saudi Arabia never came back and so they furthered their journey somewhere else, most likely to join ISIS. Because if they are not doing anything wrong, why are

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<sup>16</sup>In March 2015, The Chairman of Indonesian Intelligence Agency (BIN) Marciano Norman revealed that the Indonesian government endeavor to gather more information regarding the 16 missing Indonesians who were last seen in Turkey. BIN thinks that the strategy of using a travel agent to travel somewhere first just to transit is not a new one but often used, especially by those who went to do 'umrah' and never returned since. The Indonesian Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey have released the names of the 16 missing Indonesians in Istanbul. Among 16, 10 originating from Surabaya, East Java, whereas the other 6 came from Surakarta, Central Java.



they hiding or running away from their own government who are suppose to protect them. It is possible; there is the travelling agency that is suspected to have been helping 16 people who are now on the run to somewhere unknown.

Some Muslims in Middle East supposed to finance Indonesians wanting to join ISIS to launch what the so-called the holy jihad, even though theydo not understand the real situation in Syria and Iraq.

Based on Julie Chernov Hwang and Noor Huda Ismail's study, the Indonesian diaspora in the Middle East has been critical in assisting Indonesians seeking to fight with ISIS and the Nusra Front by providing them with logistical support and local contacts. There will be some and the concern is that these people will now have combat experience, tactical skills, weapons knowledge, deeper ideological commitment and international connections. Even if it is just a handful of people, they could provide leadership for the tiny extremist movement here

Once the jihadist arrives at the border, someone from ISIS or Jabhah al-Nusra picks them up and transports them to safe houses on the other side. Total travel costs, including the flight to Istanbul, local transport to the border, and two days accommodation along the way, are estimated at between \$1000 and \$1500.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Julie Chernov Hwang and Noor Huda Ismail, "There and Back Again: Indonesian Fighters in Syria", *The Middle East Journal*, January 27, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/there-and-back-again-indonesian-fighters-syria>.

Some Indonesians joining ISIS and the Nusra Front hail from radical groups, while others are independent operators, radicalized through the Internet. Jemaah Islamiyah members typically affiliate with Jabhah al-Nusra. Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) and Mujahidin Indonesia Timor, whose leaders have sworn bai'at (an oath of allegiance) to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, send their members to ISIS.

In this case, Aman Abdurrahman supporters have been setting themselves up as ISIS recruiters and organizing mass pledge sessions in radical mosques. In connection with this action, a few armchair jihadists like Muhammad Fachry have latched onto ISIS propaganda to widen their networks through social media and through organizing public demonstrations of support for the Islamic State. However, unlike others, M. Fachry, who leads the Forum Aktifis Syariat Islam (FAKSI, Forum of Islamic Law Activists), has, and wisely perhaps, played no direct role in sending Indonesian fighters to Syria. However, the publicity machinery he has created, especially his jihadi website Al Mustaqbal, has allowed Aman Abdurrahman to become, as Indonesia watcher Sidney Jones puts it, “the most important ideological promoter of ISIS” in Indonesia despite being physically confined to prison.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Julie Chernov Hwang and Noor Huda Ismail, “There and Back Again: Indonesian Fighters in Syria”, *The Middle East Journal*, January 27, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/there-and-back-again-indonesian-fighters-syria>.

### **ISIS, Notion of Takfirism and Islamic Extremism**

Analysts and the authorities have warned that a lack of concerted efforts in fighting the proliferation of the radical ideology propagated by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has resulted in an unprecedented rise in the number of Indonesians leaving for the Middle East to fight for the group. In total, an estimated 514 Indonesians have gone to Syria and Iraq to fight with the ISIS, around half of whom had been living in nearby countries as students or migrant workers prior to the rise of the ISIS. Indonesia is probably the region's biggest supplier of ISIS fighters. In comparison, around 40 Malaysians, 200 Filipinos and 60 Australians have joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq, according to several media reports.

One should remember that, because Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population, the country would always be at the center of recruitment, although only hundred Muslims would join ISIS. Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) director Sidney Jones noted that the number of Indonesians who went to fight in Afghanistan from 1985 to 1994 did not exceed 300.

Since the rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the government has declared ISIS an illegal organization and ideology, as they are opposed to Pancasila (Indonesia's philosophical foundation). Nevertheless, unlike in Malaysia and Singapore where ISIS supporters can be charged and detained upon their departure to the combat zone, Indonesia

authorities still have no legal basis to do the same. While the government has repeatedly emphasized the danger of ISIS ideology, maybe only the Indonesia's National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) and the National Police have been actively involved in prevention measures.

Prof. Mohamad Bazzi of New York University emphasize that, one of the pillars of ISIS' ideology is that it is the true - and only - defender of Sunni Muslims, who are being persecuted in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and everywhere else where ISIS has carried out attacks, either directly or through its affiliates. In its slick propaganda, ISIS emphasizes two major themes: a righteous and idyllic life for "true" Muslims in its self-declared Islamic state in parts of Syria and Iraq, and an ideology that sanctifies violence as the only means for Sunnis to achieve power. The extremist group is highly sophisticated in its use of social media to sow fear among its enemies, and to entice alienated Muslims living in the West to "immigrate" to ISIS-controlled territory.<sup>19</sup>

ISIS is the global ultra-Revivalists for global terrorism and never mind that ISIS selectively uses a group of clerics and scholars from across Islam's history who advocated declaring other Muslims as infidels or apostates, and justified their killing. The majority of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims reject this notion of *takfirism*. However, it is central to the

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<sup>19</sup>Mohamad Bazzi, "Trumpeting Islamophobia helps ISIS", *The Straits Times*, December 12, 2015.

ideology of most of today's militant groups, who have killed far more Muslims than non-Muslims. That fact becomes obscured as long as ISIS has new opportunities to portray itself as the defender of Muslims.<sup>20</sup>

In Indonesian Muslims perception, genealogy of the ISIS emergence, as a political movement, wrapped in clothes of Jihad by religious doctrines, in which the Islamic thinkers categorized them as the global ultra-Revivalists for global terrorism. Their deployment and activities in Indonesia would be to watch out from day to day because they danger the cohesiveness of its people. Their doctrine and religious understanding are certainly very dangerous for the continuity of tradition and culture of Indonesian Muslims, especially among the *nahdliyin* (Nahdlatul Ulama or NU) and Muhammadiyah moderate Muslims.

When the ISIS and radical Muslims movement is not forbidden, of course, there will be potential course for political upheaval that led to the horizontal conflicts among communities of Indonesia. As world leaders call for Muslims to take the lead in the ideological battle against a growing and increasingly violent offshoot of their own religion, analysts say NU/Muhammadiyah's campaign is a welcome antidote to Islamic extremism.

The campaign by NU and Muhammadiyah for an open-minded, pluralistic Islam also comes at a time when Islam is at war with itself over central theological questions

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<sup>20</sup>*ibid.*

about how the faith defined in the modern era. In a way, it should not be surprising that this message comes from Indonesia, the home of Islam Nusantara, widely seen as one of the most progressive Islamic movements in the world. The movement - its name is Indonesian for East Indies Islam - dates back more than 500 years, and promotes a spiritual interpretation of Islam that stresses non-violence, inclusiveness and acceptance of other religions. Such liberalism poses strongly a counter-argument to ISIS.

Regarding to prevent ISIS so it can not expand the reach beyond the digital realm, what the government should have been doing since two decades ago is to come up with a massive and effective campaign against radical Islamic teaching, intensively involving the country's two largest Muslim organizations Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, as well as the conservative Indonesian Council of Ulama and many popular Muslim clerics.

ISIS ideas and activities can pose a serious problem in the political, religious, and social activities in the country. Almost certainly, the main supporter of the idea of ISIS caliphate state is a radical resident or a small group who has been troubling the people of Indonesia.

More than that, it is very important to accept Pancasila as the state ideology, while Islam remains guarded as a creed. We do not need to bang the state basic and religion creed. Because, the precept of Pancasila which contains the deity is a form of the practice of Islamic law.

Caliphate is clearly irrelevant to the Muslims of Indonesia. Indonesian Islamic organizations have formed the Committee Caliphate following elimination of "caliphate" in Turkey in 1924 by the secular Turks; they intend to defend and demand that the "caliphate" in Turkey revived.

To respond this phenomenon, in the past, it was "the grand old man" Haji Agus Salim, a well-known Muslim intelligentsia, who once stated that the committee along with Indonesian caliphate is irrelevant. According to him, what is called a "caliphate" in Turkey is a despotic and corrupt empire that need not be defended, especially by Indonesian Muslims. After Caliphate Committee, the issue of caliphate was almost entirely absent in the discourse of Indonesian Islam, except articulated by Darul Islam movement led by SM Kartosuwirjo, a leader of DI (Daulah Islamiyah) who initiated Indonesian Islamic State (NII) in 1940's. Kartosuwirjo was sentenced to death under Soekarno administration in 1963.

In addition, Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah almost never talk about the caliphate. Instead, they receive and develop concepts and praxis Indonesian nation-state. The NU and Muhammadiyah realize that the caliphate utopianism lies in the fact that Muslims in the region have adopted various nation-states based on the reality of a nation with a tradition of distinctive society, culture and religion, geographical area, and different historical experiences.

Therefore, the "unification" in all regions of the Muslim world under a single political authority of Islamic Caliphate style is clearly and merely empty slogan.<sup>21</sup> The vast majority of mainstream Muslims in Indonesia is generally incorporated in NU, Muhammadiyah and so forth in across the country and nation clearly rejected ISIS, which is considered as a global terrorist organization by the claim "caliphatism" which proved to be full of violence and brutality.

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