

**The Emir of Katibah Nusantara:
BahrumSyah**
Jasminder Singh

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Top IS Militants in Southeast Asia

A new batch of radical jihadist leaders and key operatives has emerged in Southeast Asia, replacing a number of the Al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) old guard who have been killed (e.g. Azahari Husin and Noordin Top), executed (e.g. Imam Samudra and Ali Ghufron) or incarcerated (e.g. Abu Bakar Bashir and Hambali). Five of the new leaders have achieved some prominence in recent years because of their jihadist activities: BahrumSyah, Bahrun Naim and Gigih Rahmat Dewa from Indonesia, and Muhammad Wanndy and Isnilon Hapilon from Malaysia and the Philippines, respectively. They have pledged their allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of the so-called Islamic State (IS), and represent the 'fresh face' of violent extremism in the region. Their emergence attests to jihadists' ability at regeneration and leadership succession.

Unlike previous Southeast Asian jihadist leaders, a few of the present leaders like BahrumSyah, Bahrun Naim and Wanndy run terror cells from overseas in Iraq and Syria. This poses a security challenge for governments in the region. While in the past they could eliminate or neutralise the top leaders operating in Southeast Asia, now they have to contend with cell leaders who operate from overseas with impunity, issuing instructions and directives, transferring funds, and facilitating travel for jihadists. Constraining them presents a huge challenge given the ease of communications via social media.

The five leaders featured in this issue are not spiritual and ideological leaders like Abdullah Sungkar (deceased) and Abu Bakar Bashir of Jemaah Islamiyah, but strategists and tacticians like Azahari Hussin and Noordin Top who masterminded terrorist operations. This partly explains why no *wali* (governor) has been appointed for IS enclaves in Indonesia and the Philippines. Only Hapilon has been appointed as the *emir* for IS Philippines. A potential *emir* in Indonesia, Santoso, was killed in July 2016 before he could be appointed.

Together with a few others, the five jihadi leaders have contributed to raising the threat level in Southeast Asia, as evidenced by the attacks, and discovery of terror plots and cells in the region. Militants mounted attacks in Jakarta in January, Puchong (Malaysia) in June and Solo (Indonesia) in July. In August, an IS suicide bomber attempted to kill a Catholic priest and his Church congregation in Medan (Sumatra). In the same month, militants plotting to stage a rocket attack against Singapore's Marina Bay were arrested, and in October, three policemen were injured in a knife attack in Tangerang, near Jakarta. On 26 November, IS-linked militants in Indonesia were arrested for plotting to launch bomb attacks against the Myanmar Embassy, Parliament, the National Police Headquarters and several television stations. In the Philippines, a bomb exploded in Davao city in September while kidnappings for ransom and clashes with the armed forces have persisted. More than 400 militants have been arrested in the region. Clearly, there is an urgent need to identify and neutralise the principal leaders and members of terrorist cells and disrupt their plots in the region.

One of these militant leaders is BahrumSyah, a key Indonesian jihadi leader appointed by al-Baghdadi as leader of IS' Southeast Asia battalion, Katibah Nusantara, in Iraq and Syria. **Jasminder Singh** delves into BahrumSyah's background and the involvement of his combat unit in various military operations and training, manufacturing of improvised explosive devices, sniping and ideological propagation. BahrumSyah and his battle-hardened and well-trained fighters might return to the region when IS falls in Iraq and Syria and this would have serious security implications for Southeast Asia.

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Top IS Militants in Southeast Asia

Another emerging Indonesian militant is Bahrun Naim who has plotted several terrorist attacks in Indonesia. **Muh Taufiqurrohman** and **Ardi Putra Prasetya** explain Bahrun's journey towards radicalisation, his vast networks in the jihadist community, his prominence in the cyber domain, and his quest for recognition from IS Central and the jihadi community by orchestrating terror attacks in Indonesia.

V. Arianti sheds light on one of Bahrun Naim's subordinates, Gigih Rahmat Dewa who achieved notoriety for plotting to mount a rocket attack against Singapore's Marina Bay. Leader of a terror cell in Batam, an island south of Singapore, Gigih also facilitated the arrival of Uighurs into Batam and aided the migration of Indonesians to Syria.

In Malaysia, Muhammad Wandy Mohamed Jedi has emerged as a high-profile online 'celebrity' for IS sympathisers. He was behind the June 2016 Puchong grenade attack that occurred along with other IS-directed and IS-inspired 'Ramadan' attacks in several countries. **Muhammad Haziq bin Jani** examines Wandy's rise as a jihadist, his network of cells, and his threats to kill high-ranking security officials.

Another significant militant leader is Isnilon Hapilon who has been appointed emir of IS Philippines with the support of 16 militant groups in the archipelago. Hapilon is leader of the Abu Sayyaf Group faction that defected to IS in July 2014. **Angelica Barangan Habulan** cautions that an IS enclave in the Sulu Archipelago presents a security threat not only to the Philippines but also to Southeast Asia.

The terror attacks in Southeast Asia should be seen against the backdrop of more devastating suicide bombings and shootings in Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, Dhaka and elsewhere, resulting in thousands of casualties. In the months ahead, IS is likely to transform itself from a caliphate-building entity to a terrorist operations-based movement when it is fully routed in Iraq and Syria. This change is highlighted by **Mohammed Sinan Siyech** in his article which explains in some detail how IS has sowed the seeds of its own destruction. The group's self-defeating ideology of perpetual conflict and acts of savagery makes it a dangerous movement that has to be degraded and destroyed.

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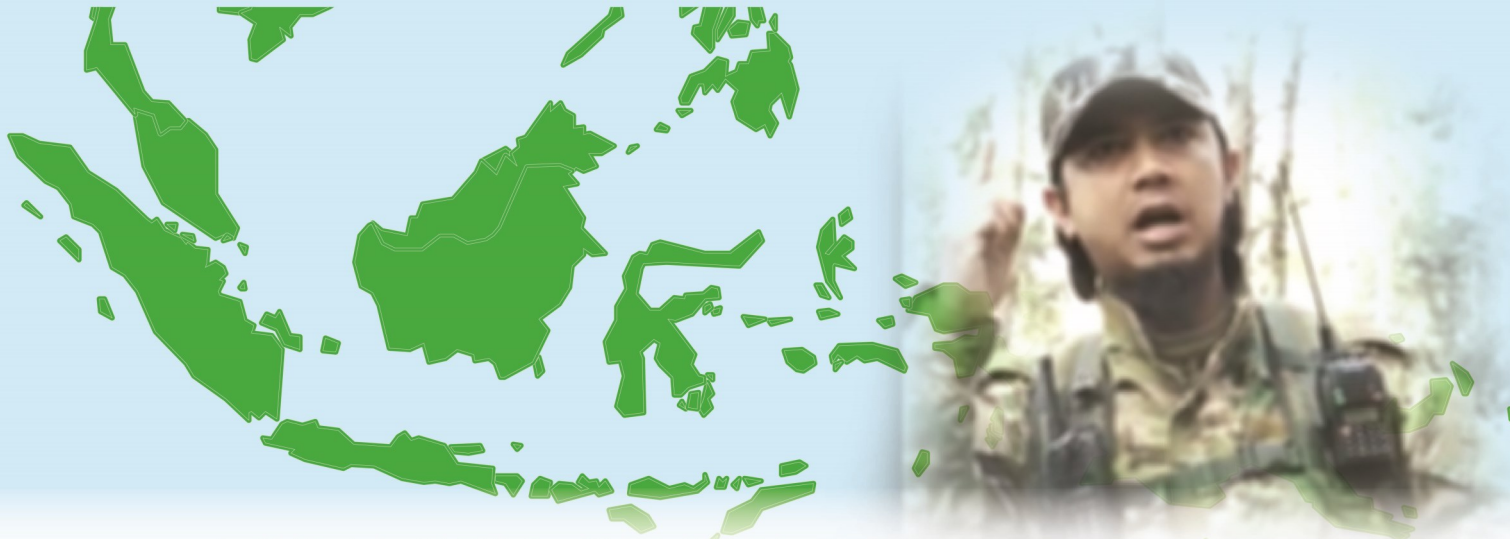
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THE EMIR OF KATIBAH NUSANTARA: BAHRUMSYAH JASMINDER SINGH

As leader of Katibah Nusantara, the Southeast Asian unit of the so-called Islamic State (IS), Bahrumsyah has largely been involved in jihad in Iraq and Syria since his arrival there in 2014. However, this situation is likely to change if IS continues to lose territory in Iraq and Syria in the months ahead. Bahrumsyah and his battle-hardened and well-trained followers might return to the region and pose a serious security challenge.

Background

Bahrumsyah has emerged as a key jihadi leader among 'Islamic State' (IS) supporters in the region, with the demise of several operational commanders of the regional terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyyah (JI) (such as Azahari Husin and Noordin Top), and the capture and incarceration of several others like Hambali, the West Java jihadi who masterminded several JI attacks in Indonesia, including the first Bali bombings. Bahrumsyah however remained under the radar of the security apparatus until he made his appearance in Syria in 2014 as the key commander of the Malay-speaking Southeast Asian jihadists affiliated with IS.

Bahrumsyah was born in Bogor, West Java in 1984. He is believed to have spent time in Pamulang, Central Java as part of his jihadi training. His *nom de guerre* — Abu Muhammad al-Indonesiy, was a name taken from his son. Bahrumsyah has three 3 wives and four children; one of his wives is the widow of a jihadist shot dead by Densus 88, the counter-terrorism Special Detachment of the Indonesian Police Force. Bahrumsyah studied at the Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah (State Islamic University) in Ciputat, South Jakarta in 2004. He was enrolled in the Department of Communications and Islamic Broadcast at the Faculty for the Proselytization (Propagation) of Islam but dropped out after three semesters. He was known to be bright, hardworking and adept in mobilising students. According to the Vice-Dean of the faculty, Sunandarnoto Abdul Hakim, Bahrumsyah appeared very religious as he displayed strong Islamic attributes and was dressed in Islamic garb. Bahrumsyah was also an expert in martial arts, including Silat and Kung Fu (IndoCrop Circles 2014).

The Rise of an Islamist Radical

Little is known about Bahrumsyaah after he left Universitas Islam in 2005. Overall, while his religiosity was well recognised, his radicalism was not. There is no concrete information regarding whether he was a member or supporter of JI. However, he is believed to be a close follower of both Ustad Aman Abdurrahman, a former key JI member, and Abu Bakar Bashir, the former JI spiritual leader (Pratama and Armandhanu 2015). It is clear though that Bahrumsyah became a follower of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), the radical group that was set up by Abu Bakar Bashyir following his split with the Majelis

Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI). Bahrumisyah's mentor, Ustad Aman, was also a key leader of JAT.

Bahrumisyah first came to public prominence in 2014 when he participated in a demonstration with other leading radicals in front of Hotel Indonesia in central Jakarta where they declared their support and allegiance to the then Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Following the demonstration, Bahrumisyah joined others in holding public gatherings in support of ISIS.

On 25 April 2014, Bahrumisyah, in close association with the Salafi groups based in the West Java city of Bekasi (adjacent to Jakarta) led by Syamsudin Uba, made an attempt to influence a gathering at the Masjid Muhammad Ramadhan that had just been taken over by the moderate local Bekasi administration. At the first Friday prayers, Uba invited Bahrumisyah to deliver the *khutbah* (sermon), but he was unable to do so due to objections from the mosque administration. Another incident occurred at Masjid Muhajirun, a nearby mosque south of Bekasi, when Uba, Bahrumisyah and his supporters staged a mass walkout (Megapolitan.kompas.com 2014). Some sources state that Bahrumisyah left for Syria after this incident, with funds coming from Chep Hernawan, an Indonesian business tycoon with radical beliefs. Chep had been described as 'President of IS in Indonesia' by Abu Bakar Bashir (Tisnadibrata 2015). In 1998, Chep had founded the Islamic Reformist Movement or GARIS, with the aim of transforming Indonesia into an 'Islamic State'. Chep admitted that he had funded Bahrumisyah's travel to Syria along with the travel of more than 150 other jihadists who came mostly from West Java. Chep added that the jihadists he funded were mostly supporters of GARIS. In March 2015, he stated that he was in regular communication with Bahrumisyah, who by this time had emerged as the leader of the Southeast Asian jihadists supporting IS in Syria and Iraq (Pratama and Armandhanu 2015).

Bahrumisyah as Emir of Katibah Nusantara

Bahrumisyah's reasons for undertaking violent jihadi operations in Syria and Iraq stemmed from two key factors that will be discussed below. These factors influenced him and largely shaped the thoughts and belief systems of other Indonesian jihadists in Iraq and Syria. The number of these jihadists is estimated at 1,000, with many travelling along with their families and children.

“Overall, while his religiosity was well recognised, his radicalism was not.”

The first factor was domestic in nature. According to Chep, Indonesian jihadists reached a consensus in December 2011 during a meeting in Cianjur, West Java, that they would not undertake armed or violent jihad in Indonesia for the time being. This was due to the counter-productive effects of JI's militant activities, which led to many Indonesian casualties and the decimation of the bulk of JI jihadi leadership by the police. While this was agreed upon by the 'senior jihadists', the 'junior jihadists' were unhappy with the consensus as they wanted to take action against the Indonesian government and its supporters whom they viewed as *thaghut* (transgressors) who should be killed. In Chep's words, "...as there was this commitment not to undertake violence in Indonesia and I feared that these young jihadists may undertake violence, I decided to send them there [Syria and Iraq]" (Pratama and Armandhanu 2015).

The second factor was the perception that it was the right time to undertake jihad in Syria and Iraq in the name of Dawlah Islamiyah, led by the 'Caliph', Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi. Overall, the struggle to establish an Islamic Caliphate was viewed as defensive jihad to safeguard the Islamic faith and Sunnis in Iraq and Syria. This perception arose largely following the US-led intervention in Iraq in 2003 and later, the transfer of power to the Iraqi Shias in 2004. These political developments contributed to the persecution and killing of Iraqi Sunnis in large numbers, partly in revenge for Saddam Hussein's past actions and his broad repression of the Iraqi Shia majority. After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, fighting the Shias became a priority for IS, as Sunni Muslims were believed to be oppressed and discriminated against. These acuties gained traction in Indonesia and led to the migration of some Indonesian radicals to Syria and Iraq to join the ranks of IS. Both factors mentioned here are likely to have played a key role in Bahrumisyah's *hijrah* (migration) to Syria

(Pratama and Armandhanu 2015).

Bahrumisyah as Commander of Southeast Asian Jihadists

Bahrumisyah was appointed emir of Katibah Nusantara by al-Baghdadi. This unit was formed in Hasakah in Syria and has been involved in various combat operations, military training, handling of sophisticated weapons, manufacturing of improvised explosive devices, sniping and ideological propagation. He is also involved in IS-related propaganda and recruitment, calling on Indonesians to join IS. He has been featured in three IS propaganda videos, the first of which was released in August 2014, followed shortly afterwards by two others. One of these videos showed young boys undergoing military training and indoctrination and another showed Bahrumisyah in military fatigues, giving instructions to armed jihadists. Katibah Nusantara also focuses on demonstrating that Southeast Asia, with one of the largest concentration of Muslims in the world, is in support of IS.

Certain reports in 2015 had wrongly claimed that Bahrumisyah had died (YouTube 2015). There have also been claims of splits in Katibah Nusantara, with leadership challenges being mounted by other Indonesian jihadists, such as Abu Jandal (recently reported to have died) and Bahrin Naim. However, these too are unfounded and his appointment as emir by al-Baghdadi has not changed (Parameswaran 2016). Indonesian IS supporters, especially those based in Bekasi, have confirmed that Bahrumisyah is alive and in command of Katibah Nusantara despite the aerial attacks by Russian and Syrian air forces. The airstrikes have nevertheless forced many of Katibah Nusantara fighters to seek refuge in various parts of IS-held territories. As many of them are presently located in Mosul, the current military operation in Mosul could affect the future of Katibah Nusantara in a similar manner as the battle for control of Aleppo and Raqqa. Any adverse impact on the future of Katibah Nusantara will affect Bahrumisyah's leadership.

The Future: Bringing the Battle to Southeast Asia

Should IS be routed in Iraq and Syria, there is a high possibility that many of the Indonesian fighters would return to Indonesia or southern Philippines. More than 300 Indonesian fighters are believed to have already done so. This would

“The possibility of Bahrumisyah and Isnlon Hapilon, the emir of IS Philippines, working together will also determine the threat level in Southeast Asia.”

have serious security implications for Indonesia and the region as these are battle-hardened and experienced fighters, ideologically fortified, and adept in networking. The threat would be heightened if charismatic and 'al-Baghdadi-appointed' commanders such as Bahrumisyah take charge of the jihadi struggle in Southeast Asia. The possibility of Bahrumisyah and Isnlon Hapilon, the emir of IS Philippines, working together will also determine the threat level in Southeast Asia. As the return of foreign fighters would be a game changer in respect of the terrorism threat in the region, governments in Southeast Asia especially Indonesia and the Philippines, would have to prevent returnees such as Bahrumisyah from exploiting the situation and pushing the violent jihadi cause in Southeast Asia.

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A RISING INDONESIAN JIHADIST PLOTTER: BAHRUN NAIM

MUH TAUFIQURROHMAN AND ARDI PUTRA PRASETYA

Bahrn Naim is a rising Indonesian militant who has plotted several terrorist attacks against police and other targets in Indonesia since 2015. He was responsible for orchestrating four terrorist plots in Indonesia: the August 2015 failed bombings in Central Java, the December 2015 failed bombing plot in Jakarta, the July 2016 suicide bombing in Solo, and the failed plot to attack Singapore's Marina Bay in mid-2016. Bahrn, who is in Syria, hopes his various terrorist plots will earn him respect from the Indonesian jihadi community and recognition from the leadership of the so-called Islamic State (IS).

Background: Bahrn Naim's Personal life

Muhamad Bahrnaim Anggih Tamtomo alias Bahrn Naim was born in Pekalongan in Central Java in 1963. He spent most of his life in Solo where he studied informatics engineering at the Surakarta State University. Following his graduation, he worked as a computer technician at an internet café and sold flags decorated with Islamic symbols for a living. Bahrn has two wives, Rafiqa Hanum from West Sumatra, and Sri Lestari, a former member of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and an ex-student of the Surakarta Muhammadiyah University. Both are now in Syria with him, along with their two children.

Bahrn Naim's Journey towards IS: From Radicalism to Terrorism

Bahrn was introduced to radical teachings when he attended religious gatherings at mosques in Solo when he was in high school. At university, he joined Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), a radical group that seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate in Indonesia. The similarity in the pan-Islamist ideology of Hizbut Tahrir and the 'Islamic State' (IS) contributed to Bahrn's attraction to IS. This is also the case with other IS-linked Indonesian supporters with a HTI background. Bahrn has discussed his perspectives on the shortcomings of HTI and reasons for joining IS with HTI critics over Telegram chat application groups such as the Kopi Hitam (black coffee) and New Kopi Hitam (new black coffee).

One of Bahrn's close friends from the radical community was Purnama Putra alias Usman, a former classmate who was an important figure in Komite Penanggulangan Krisis (KOMPAK/Committee for Crisis Management), a group which was involved in actively dispatching jihadists to fight against Christians in Ambon and Poso between the years 1999 to 2007. He helped Noordin Top, the mastermind of major bombings in Indonesia in 2000-2009 and one of the leaders of the regional terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), procure a detonating cord and two personal weapons prior to the Australian Embassy bombing in 2004. In 2005, Usman asked Bahrn to store ammunitions for him (The Sukoharjo District Court 2011).

Bahrn also joined the radical group Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) when it was established by former JI spiritual leader Abu Bakar Bashir in 2008. In 2010, the police hunted down the group members involved in

JAT's illegal military training in Aceh, and arrested Bahrn after he was found storing caches of ammunitions. Consequently, in June 2011, he was sentenced to two-and-half years of imprisonment. After his release in 2013, Bahrn worked as a freelance journalist while continuing his membership with JAT. When the Syrian civil war broke out, he considered going there to wage armed jihad. He did so in 2014, shortly after JAT leader Abu Bakar Bashir pledged his allegiance to IS in July 2014 (Arrahmah 2014).

Bahrn Naim's IS Cells: Planning Attacks in Indonesia

In Syria, Bahrn tried to gain the attention of IS' top leadership by planning terrorist attacks in Indonesia. In June 2015, he planned bombing attacks against a police precinct, a Christian church and a Confucian temple located in Solo in Central Java. To implement his plans, he set up his first IS cell with the help of his childhood friend Ibadurrahman alias Ibad. Through Ibad, he recruited several members of a radical group, Tim Hisbah, to carry out his bombing plot (Tim Hisbah had actively targeted places considered to be un-Islamic, including local night clubs, massage parlours and brothels). The cell made preparations for a coordinated multiple-target bomb attack on 17 August 2015 to coincide with Indonesia's Independence Day. The attacks were intended to warn the 'enemies of Islam', particularly the police (for arresting Tim Hisbah members and IS supporters), and the Christians (for allegedly oppressing Muslims in Ambon and Poso). However, before the plotters could execute the attacks, they were arrested in mid-August 2015 (Bob 2015). Those who escaped the police dragnet fled to Bekasi in West Java where they joined another cell created by Bahrn in September 2015.

The prominent members of the Bekasi cell included Bahrn's high school friend Arif Hidayatulloh, and Faris Abdullah Cuma alias Ali, a Uighur. The cell, which included two bomb-makers and a suicide bomber, planned to attack senior officers of the Indonesian Nasional Police, Jakarta police and the Depok mobile brigade headquarters, the Indonesian National Police chief's residence, the governor of Jakarta (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama alias Ahok), a Shiite shrine and the Jewish community in Bogor, West Java. The police however managed to detect the plot and arrested several of them in December 2015; one of the bomb-makers however managed to flee to Klaten in Central Java

“In Syria, Bahrn tried to gain the attention of IS top leadership by planning terrorist attacks in Indonesia.”

(Kotaromulos 2015).

While Bahrn ran his IS cell in Bekasi, he was also leading the IS cell in Batam with the assistance of Gigih Rahmat Dewa, whom he had met in Solo in 2000. Bahrn was Gigih's religious mentor when he was studying at a senior high school. The Batam cell was dedicated towards smuggling Uighur terrorists into Indonesia for training in Poso and bombing operations in Java (Fadli 2016). It also arranged the outbound trips for Indonesians who wanted to join IS in Syria. The Batam cell was also responsible for the plot to mount a rocket attack against Singapore Marina Bay. The plot was foiled when police arrested the cell members in August 2016.

As pressures mounted from IS Central leadership for their Indonesian counterparts to carry out attacks, Bahrn instructed a Bekasi cell member, Nur Rohman, to carry out a suicide bombing mission against the Surakarta City Police headquarters; he did so in July 2016, killing himself but only injuring a police officer (IPAC 2016).

Reactions to the failed suicide bombing in social media platforms were highly negative. In fact, Bahrn had to defend Nur Rohman and deflect attention from the poor operational capabilities of his cell by spreading rumours that the police had minimised the number of police casualties (IPAC 2016). Bahrn sought to amplify the impact of the failed attack in Telegram groups, such as Warung Kopi, by claiming that Nur Rohman actually killed four policemen in his attack.

IS Cells in Indonesia: Calling out for IS' Attention?

The IS-related cells that Bahrn created in Indonesia have certain commonalities. First, most of the members came from Tim Hisbah

whose members Bahrn has known for more than five years and are his close friends. Secondly, the majority of the cell members are young, between 19 and 35 years old. They have gone through an active radicalisation process in Tim Hisbah and other radical groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front and HTI. Like Bahrn, they are also desperate to conduct a successful attack and gain the attention of IS Central and other jihadi supporters.

Bahrn has often discussed computer hacking and bomb-making skills across various Telegram groups. For instance, in early August 2016 he distributed a list containing the personal information of staff working for the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT), presenting it as a result of his hacking activity. In reality, the list can be accessed openly on the internet. This leads towards the third commonality between Bahrn's cells, namely, their members are highly social media and internet savvy. They communicate via encrypted Telegram chats and know how to evade internet surveillance from the security apparatus. Lastly, the members of these cells, including Bahrn, are committed to their cause, although amateurish in their actions as evident by the failed bomb plots.

Conclusion

Regardless of Bahrn's failure to conduct a successful attack in Indonesia, his association with IS figures in Syria, and his drive and determination to execute terror attacks make him a threat to national security. The Indonesian government will need to continue monitoring members of Bahrn's Indonesian cells as well as Tim Hisbah where the majority of Bahrn's recruits come from. The government should also expose Bahrn's disinformation and falsehoods disseminated in the social media domain. Members of IS-linked Telegram groups should be made aware of Bahrn's duplicity and manipulation of his support base to enhance his position within the jihadi community and gain recognition from IS Central.

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“Bahrn has often discussed computer hacking and bomb-making skills across various Telegram groups.”

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THE IT JIHADIST IN BATAM: GIGIH RAHMAT DEWA

V.ARIANTI

Gigih Rahmat Dewa is the leader of the Batam cell Katibah Gonggong Rebus (KGR) that is linked to the so-called Islamic State. Under Gigih's leadership, KGR planned to launch a rocket attack on Singapore Marina Bay as well as other attacks in Batam. Gigih also reportedly played an instrumental role in facilitating the arrival of Uighurs into Batam and the departure of Indonesians to Syria. He is believed to have provided logistical support for Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia/MIT), the pro-IS group based in Poso, Central Sulawesi.

Background

Gigih Rahmat Dewa was born in Pemalang, Central Java, in 1985. After the death of his parents, Gigih moved to Solo, another city in Central Java, where he lived with an aunt and studied at a high school there (Arshad 2016a). It was in Solo that Gigih first met with future IS jihadist Bahrun Naim who was then a mentor for religious studies at the high school (Haluan Kepri 2016a). Gigih briefly attended universities in Semarang, the capital city of Central Java, and in Malaysia, but dropped out soon after. He then attended the Batam State Polytechnic, majoring in Informatics Engineering and graduated in 2014. Anecdotes by Gigih's classmates at the polytechnic reveal a young man who was fluent in English and well versed in web programming. Prior to his arrest in August 2016, Gigih, who is married with a one-year-old daughter, worked as an IT staff at PT Sianipak, a Japanese bag manufacturing company in Batam. He was immediately dismissed by the company after details of his involvement with terrorism emerged (Harun Al Rasyid 2016). Gigih appears to have been radicalised through social media and was also reportedly in touch with Bahrun Naim in late 2014 (Berita 2016).

Formation of the KGR Terrorist Cell

Around August 2015, Gigih formed and led Katibah Gonggong Rebus (KGR), a 10-14 member terrorist cell linked to Bahrun Naim. Based in Batam, an island south of Singapore, KGR was one of several cells operating under Bahrun Naim's instructions. Two other cells operating under Bahrun Naim included the Solo-based cell led by Ibadurrahman alias Ibad, and Arif Hidayatulloh's cell that was based in Bekasi, a city in West Java, adjacent to Jakarta. The leaders of these cells were typically Bahrun Naim's old friends or acquaintances, as was Gigih himself. These cells can be seen as Bahrun's command-cell network for launching attacks, which he had described on his website in November 2015. These operating cells determine the target, mode of attack (i.e. assassination, kidnapping, ambush) and weapons to be used for the operation (Bahrun Naim 2015a).

Gigih recruited a number of skilled professionals into KGR's ranks, including a 46-year-old man named Trio Syafrido who worked in a bank, and 20-year-old Hadi Gusti Yanda who worked in a laptop manufacturing company (Haluan Kepri 2016b). Bahrun Naim recruited 35-year-old Eka Saputra and 21-

year-old Tarmidzi as weapons assemblers, both of whom were employed at another electronic manufacturing company (Haluan Kepri 2016b).

KGR's Plan to Attack Marina Bay Sands

According to media reports, authorities detected Gigih and Bahrun Naim discussing plans to launch a rocket from Batam (Arshad 2016a). KGR also had plans to attack shopping malls, an international sea port in Batam, and other places in Indonesia by deploying suicide bombers, on Bahrun Naim's instructions (Tribun Jambi and Rakyat Merdeka Online 2016). On the rocket attack, KGR planned to launch it from a hilltop in Taman Habibie, in the north-western part of Batam. Bahrun Naim also planned to send expert technicians to make the explosives and to prepare for the strike (Chan 2016a). In preparation for the attack, Bahrun Naim also taught KGR members to make rockets using online sources and considered assembling the weapon with mortar, grenade or other material (Batam Today 2016).

Analysts believe that the rocket technicians could have been sourced from IS loyalist strongholds in Central and West Java as it was unlikely that KGR possessed the weaponry or expertise to build a rocket (Chan 2016a). One West Java-based pro-IS militant Dodi Suridi, had successfully assembled and test-fired a home-made rocket, relying on a method which he learnt on Youtube. Dodi also helped with assembling a home-made bomb used in the January 2016 attacks in Thamrin Jakarta, an attack that was linked to another Indonesian IS fighter, Abu Jandal (Chan 2016a, 2016b, Chan and Soeriaatmadja 2016). However, the link between KGR and Dodi remains unclear. In addition, another member of KGR, 24-year-old Leonardus Hutajulu reportedly planned to enter Singapore for work, along with five other people through an illegal third-party agency. There is no information on whether his work arrangement was linked to KGR's plan to launch a rocket attack on Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, or to other terror activities (Chan 2016c).

Other KGR Roles

KGR's other roles were to facilitate the movement of Indonesians to Syria to join IS, and the Uighurs who were planning to join the pro-IS group MIT, based in Poso, Central Sulawesi (JPNN 2016). In particular, KGR facilitated the movement of two Chinese Uighurs, Dony and Ali

“Indonesian officials detected Gigih and Bahrun Naim discussing plans to launch a rocket from Batam .”

alias Nur Muhammet Abdullah, into Batam via Malaysia by sea. Gigih might have also facilitated the departure of Dwi Djoko Wiwoho in August 2015 to Syria; Dwi worked in BP Batam's Data Centre and Information System (PDSI), the same organisation as Gigih's wife (Batam Times 2016). Dony was eventually arrested in early 2016 and deported back to China. KGR received funding from East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) to finance the Uighurs (Metro Tabagsel 2016, Basuki Rahmat 2016). In preparation for Syria, KGR also organised regular firearms training sessions for the members using airsoft guns in Nongsa district, Batam (Arshad 2016b; Dewi 2016). Gigih also reportedly provided logistical support for MIT (JPNN 2016). Most importantly, KGR planned to develop terrorist cells in Indonesia and across the region (Rakyat Merdeka Online 2016).

The Way Forward

KGR's terrorist plans were disrupted following the arrest of its leader Gigih and several other members, aged between 19 and 46, on 5 August 2016. Authorities also arrested Leonardus on 3 September 2016 in Batam. However, there are likely around eight KGR members still at large (Arshad 2016c). Gigih's arrest will be a heavy blow to KGR's overseas contacts in Turkey and in Malaysia who are responsible for facilitating the movement of Uighurs into Indonesia.

With the arrest of KGR members, it is likely that the remaining members will seek to implement an 'exit strategy' which Bahrun Naim has outlined in his command cell manual. This would entail recruitment efforts and intelligence operations against police by KGR members while in detention. Indonesia's correctional institutions will need to keep a close watch on Gigih to prevent him from communicating with KGR members and from making plans to carry

out a terrorist attack by KGR members who remain at large.

Although Gigih's cell failed to execute the Marina Bay plot, it should be noted that other terror cells and 'lone wolves' were 'successful' as seen in the attacks in Jakarta in January and Solo in July this year. In August, a suicide bomber attacked a Catholic priest in Medan, North Sumatra (Imam Budailaksono 2016), and in October, three policemen were injured in a knife attack in Tangerang, near Jakarta, in a second attack in Indonesia recognised by IS. Clearly, there are many terror cells and potential 'lone wolves' in and outside Indonesia. Their sheer numbers pose a great challenge to intelligence and security agencies which have to identify terrorist cells like Gigih's early enough to disrupt their plots.

Gigih's plot to fire a rocket across the seas raises other broader issues relating to counter-terrorism. Terrorists are willing and determined to explore various ways of overcoming geographical obstacles and penetrating counter-terrorism defences to achieve their objectives. Local cells like Gigih's are prepared to subordinate themselves to IS-linked operators in Iraq and Syria and take orders to launch terror attacks. The vulnerabilities of countries to plots hatched outside their borders underscore the transnational nature of the terrorist threat and the need for greater cooperation and collaboration for the timely identification and elimination of these terror cells.

Gigih's cell was not only involved in plotting terror attacks but also in smuggling jihadists across borders, raising or receiving funds for terrorism-related activities, and firearms training. The ease with which Gigih's and other terror cells could operate across the archipelago suggests the need for more intensive investigations and monitoring of radical groups. This is imperative given the likelihood for more well-trained and experienced Southeast Asian fighters returning from Iraq and Syria to IS enclaves in Indonesia and the Philippines as well as to urban and rural areas, melting with the local population to operate surreptitiously to further the jihadists' cause.

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“Indonesia’s correctional institutions must keep a close watch on Gigih to prevent him from communicating with KGR members and from making plans to carry out a terrorist attack successfully in the region.”

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MALAYSIA'S 'JIHADIST CELEBRITY': MUHAMMAD WANNDY MOHAMED JEDI MUHAMMAD HAZIQ BIN JANI

Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi, also known as Abu Hamzah Al-Fateh, is a Malaysian with no known prior links to terrorist organisations. He became radicalised, joined the so-called Islamic State (IS) and pushed its religio-political agenda through his online activities. Wandy has become an online 'jihadist-celebrity' and is linked to various home-grown cells in Malaysia, including the cell responsible for the Puchong grenade attack in June 2016.

Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi, 26, was born in Alor Gajah, Malacca (Malaysia). The third son out of 4 siblings, he lost his mother to leukaemia in 2011. Wanndy lived with his elder brother in a home built by the *Projek Perumahan Rakyat Termiskin* (Housing Project for Poor Citizens). His neighbours would not have suspected that the same house would later be a location where Wanndy met with militants or supporters of the so-called Islamic State (Utusan Melayu 2015). Neither would they have expected him to turn out to be Malaysia's 'jihadist celebrity', involved in a gruesome beheading and clandestine plots that threaten his country's security.

The Rise of a 'jihadist-celebrity'

The full extent of Wanndy's initial involvement in IS, motivations for joining IS and exact role and responsibilities in IS cannot be confirmed. However, his story is a troubling narrative of self-radicalisation. With no prior links to any jihadist organisation, he found his way into the ranks of IS and became a 'jihadist-celebrity' himself. A short-tempered person who was expelled from his secondary school (Murali 2015), he was not knowledgeable about religious affairs and was once chided by his fellow villager for having brought home many girls (Berita Harian 2015).

Wanndy, whose wife is with him in Syria, was one of two Malaysians identified in a 30-second IS-linked video posted on 22 February 2015, reportedly self-filmed and uploaded on his Facebook account (FMT Reporters 2015). The text accompanying the gruesome beheading video read: "This is punishment for a spy who betrays Islam (sic)... a lesson to all." Around this time, authorities also detected that Wanndy's Facebook posts were frequently updated with terrorist activities. He attributed his so-called 'jihad in Syria' to a person whom he talked to on Facebook, where he came to learn about jihad. The other person in the February 2015 video was 20-year-old Mohd Faris Anuar, who died in November 2015, following a US airstrike on Anbar province, Iraq (The Straits Times 2015; Abu Miswak Lima 2015). Wanndy was among the many IS supporters who were recruited online, and who would later become a jihadi 'recruiter' himself (Varandani 2015).

After Wanndy's video went viral on 22 February 2015, Malaysian newspapers drew attention to his role in terrorism, and this generated interest in his Facebook account. His accounts were duly deactivated due to the graphic nature of the terrorist activities portrayed, but Wanndy created new Facebook accounts to replace those that were shut down. These cycles resulted in the popularisation of his various monikers

such as Abu Sayyaf Malizi and Abu Hamzah Al-Fateh among Malaysian online jihadist community. Each time a new Facebook account was created it would generate hundreds to more than a thousand friends, a development of deep concern to the authorities as Wanndy was not the only online IS-linked terrorist 'celebrity'. Other popular militant-'celebrities' included Lotfi Ariffin, Malik Skema, Khairul Anuar, Salman Rahim, Fudhail Omar, Akel Zainal, Zainuri Kamarudin, and Zahar bin Abdullah.

Before Wanndy and other Malaysian militant personalities developed a cult-like following online, they relied on online extremist social media groups such as 'Generasi al-Ghuroba' (Generation of the Foreigners) and 'Rakyat Malaysia Bersama Revolusi Islam' (Malaysian Citizens For Islamic Revolution) which have existed since 2013. Their social media accounts came to popular attention only in 2014 by which time they had amassed thousands of Facebook followers. Some Facebook accounts had the maximum-allowed number of 5,000 friends. This large following was nourished through the constant updates of news which the fighters provided in the Malay language. Updates on their movements and lifestyle provided a glimpse of life as terrorists in Syria, and served to contextualise and personalise the predominantly Arab-speaking terrorist groups for their Malaysian online followers. By 2015, the Malaysian online extremist community was predominantly pro-IS, with Wanndy being the most prominent Malaysian IS fighter online.

Recruitment and Cell Leadership

The Jakarta terror attacks on 14 January 2016 confirmed the existence of a network of cells stretching from Syria and Iraq to Southeast Asia. They were executed by one of the terrorist cells whose members were arrested from August to December 2015. These terrorist cells received instructions from IS Central through Indonesian foreign fighters such as Bahrun Naim (Jerard 2016). A similar network of cells exists in Malaysia. Wanndy had been active in recruiting new members and providing instructions to IS-inspired cells in Malaysia via social media throughout 2015, if not earlier. On 11 January 2016, days after the Jakarta attacks, the Malaysian Special Branch arrested a married couple at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). Recruited by Wanndy through Facebook and Telegram, they were intercepted in

“Wanndy created highly decentralised networks and cells in order to avoid detection and to increase the chances of a successful operation.”

Gaziantep by Turkish authorities on 15 November 2015, as they were attempting to cross the Turkish border into Syria to join IS (Polis Diraja Malaysia 2016a). In May 2016, three other individuals were arrested for attempting to join IS (Al Jabri 2016).

Wanndy also inspired so-called 'lone wolves' to mount attacks in Malaysia. On 15 January 2016, a 28-year-old was arrested in Kuala Lumpur after planning to conduct a suicide attack on Wanndy's instructions (Polis Diraja Malaysia 2016a). Wanndy created highly decentralised networks and cells in order to avoid detection and to increase the chances of a successful operation. Wanndy was behind three separate cells whose members were arrested in January, March and May 2016. From 22 to 24 January 2016, Malaysian police launched multiple operations throughout Malaysia that led to the arrest of 7 individuals who had plans to launch attacks in the country (The Malaysian Insider 2016). The cell members were arrested across Malaysia; some of them were tasked with acquiring and distributing funds for recruitment and terror attacks in Malaysia. Along with the arrests, 30 bullets of different calibres, jihad books, ISIS flags and a propaganda video were seized (The Star 2016a).

In March 2016, Malaysian police detained fifteen suspected IS militants, including a policewoman across seven states (Zolkepli 2016). Similar to the January arrests, this cell was also receiving instructions from Wanndy, to carry out attacks in the country. The suspects were involved in fundraising for a terrorist group in the Philippines and for IS fighters in Syria, collecting materials for bomb-making, hacking several government websites, forming links with terrorist groups in the region, recruitment and making travel

arrangements for new recruits to travel to Syria. The suspects were believed to have arranged the entry of two Uighur militants into the country before securing safe passage for them to Indonesia (Polis Diraja Malaysia 2016a).

In May 2016, Malaysian police arrested fourteen individuals linked to IS. Eight of them were caught in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak, Perlis and Johor, after being suspected of channelling funds to IS and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in southern Philippines (Leong 2016). All eight of them were linked to Wanndy; one of them is his older brother who used a personal bank account to collect funds for IS.

The existence of these cells demonstrates Wanndy's drive, not just to recruit new members for IS, but also to materialise some form of terrorist act in Malaysia. Wanndy understood that a cell based in a single location conducting overt terrorist training and activities would raise suspicions. To circumvent this weakness, he operated in the online world where cell members were spread out throughout the country and would not be easily detected. He also ensured that cell members do not communicate with members from other cells, so that if one were to be compromised, the rest would remain undetected and could continue with their terrorist activities.

Wanndy's planning and preparations bore fruit in late June 2016 when one of Wanndy's cells carried out the first IS-linked attack in Malaysia (Middleton 2016). Wanndy instructed members from one of his cells to carry out a grenade attack on the Movidia bar in Puchong. The attack, which injured eight people, was believed to be in retaliation for the arrest of Wanndy's brother in May 2016 and as a direct challenge to the Malaysian police (Bernama 2016). The Puchong attack was also probably part of a series of IS-directed and IS-inspired 'Ramadan' attacks in several countries such as the attacks at Istanbul Airport (45 killed) on the same day as the Puchong attack, the Gulshan attack in Dhaka (29 killed) on 1 July, the Baghdad bombings (325 killed) on 3 July and the Medina bombings (4 killed) on 4 July.

Wanndy has grown more brazen since the Puchong attack. In July 2016, Wanndy threatened to kill the Head of Malaysia's Special Branch Counter-Terrorism Division (CTD) in a personal phone call to the CTD Head. The Malaysian Inspector General of Police and

“Wanndy’s planning and preparations bore fruit in late June 2016, when one of Wanndy’s cells carried out the first IS-linked attack in Malaysia .”

several other police and military officers are also on IS' hit list (The Straits Times 2016). Shortly after the Puchong attack, police detained a senior IS member and 13 suspected militants, and seized a ready-made Improvised Explosive Device (IED) meant for attacking high ranking police personnel (AsiaOne 2016). Malaysian police revealed that two of the Movidia attackers had received instructions from Wanndy who had instructed them to attack senior Malaysian leaders and police officers as well as judges "because these three groups are the ones who are trying to block militant activity" (CNA 2016). Police revealed that two cell members were waiting for fresh orders from Wanndy to attack a Johor entertainment outlet with a M67 grenade which was seized. A third man had received orders to attack the police headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, and government complexes in Putrajaya (The Straits Times 2016).

Looking Ahead

Wanndy has clearly emerged as a major IS operative posing a significant threat to Malaysia. Since the attack on the nightclub in Puchong in June, several more of Wanndy's cells were uncovered in subsequent months. One of them goes by the codename Gagak Hitam (Black Crow) whose members included businessmen, technicians, bank staff, an executive manager and a school counsellor (The Straits Times 2016). Fourteen of them were detained in a security operation across six states. Wanndy is said to be dissatisfied with the Puchong attack and has been relentlessly recruiting members and sympathisers to launch new attacks in Malaysia; he has also reportedly raised more

than RM100,000 based on "donations" from his cell members and sympathisers (The Straits Times 2016).

Despite IS' military setbacks and significant loss of top leaders, fighters and territory in Iraq and Syria, Wanndy has remained determined to push IS religio-political agenda in Malaysia. He and several other online jihadists have succeeded in influencing many to support IS' struggle from afar. The Malaysian police have managed to "squash nine plots targeting certain institutions and public areas so far" (The Straits Times 2016). Over 250 individuals, including foreigners, have been detained for investigations into suspected links with terror groups (The Straits Times 2016). The online jihadists like Wanndy are clearly preying on the vulnerabilities and susceptibilities of certain segments of the population. Much more will need to be done on both the ideological as well as the operational fronts to counter IS terrorist appeals and to prevent terrorist attacks.

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THE EMIR OF IS PHILIPPINES: ISNILON HAPILON

ANGELICA BARANGAN HABULAN

Sixteen militant groups in south Philippines have pledged allegiance to the so-called Islamic State (IS), and rallied behind veteran Filipino guerrilla leader Isnilon Hapilon, the emir of IS Philippines. An emerging IS wilayah (province) in Southeast Asia, IS Philippines has been involved in kidnappings-for-ransom, beheadings and clashes with the armed forces. The presence of an IS enclave in the Sulu Archipelago presents a serious security threat not only to the Philippines but also to Southeast Asia and requires urgent measures to mitigate the threat.

Introduction

Isnilon Toton Hapilon, the leader of IS Philippines, was formerly one of the leaders of the Philippines' most notorious terrorist organisation, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), before the battalion under Hapilon, Al-Harakatul Islamiyyah, pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in July 2014. He is also the older brother of ASG commander Bakkal Hapilon who was killed by the police in 2002. Isnilon Hapilon, 50, was born in Basilan and is a member of the Yakan indigenous Muslim tribe in the Sulu Archipelago. Said to be a religious man who speaks a number of languages, including Tagalog, Arabic, Tausug, and Yakan, Hapilon is deemed fit to be a leader as he is multi-lingual and possesses basic bomb-making skills and combat knowledge (Associated Press 2007a).

Beginnings with Abu Sayyaf

Before joining ASG, Hapilon was a commander of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a Muslim separatist group founded in 1972. In 1991, Hapilon left MNLF and helped militant leader Abdurajak Janjalani found and organise ASG. In the early years of ASG, Hapilon was part of the ASG's Central Committee with minimal involvement in violent activities. After Janjalani's death in a police shoot-out in 1998, he was replaced by his younger brother Khadaffy Janjalani. Hapilon became known as "The Deputy" or the second-in-command of the ASG. He also became a close adviser to Khadaffy and subsequently held many positions of operational leadership, which enabled him to have a strong influence in the group's decision-making process. Hapilon served as an instructor of military tactics at an ASG camp in 1999 (UNSC 2015) and established "Camp Usama" in 2002 to train numerous ASG cadres. From 2003 to 2004, Hapilon commanded roughly 70-100 ASG members.

During Khadaffy's leadership, Hapilon took part in more high-profile attacks, including kidnappings, gaining notoriety in the process. The ASG is known for abducting civilians, both Filipino and foreign nationals, threatening to behead them if large ransoms are not paid. Hapilon was instrumental in some of these kidnappings. For instance, in March 2000, Hapilon led the operation to kidnap 52 students and teachers from a local elementary and high school in Sumisip, Basilan. They were subsequently used as "human shields" against the military soldiers pursuing them (The Philippine Star 2001). In December 2000, Hapilon was involved in holding an American hostage, and in May 2001, he and other ASG members abducted, detained and transported 20 hostages comprising 17 Filipinos and three Americans (U.S. Treasury Department 2005). The hostages were kidnapped from the Dos Palmas Resort and were

then moved around the jungles of Basilan for a year. Two of the Filipino hostages and one of the Americans were beheaded in June 2001. The FBI has added Hapilon to its “Most Wanted Terrorist” list with a reward of up to USD 5 million for information leading directly to his apprehension or conviction.

Hapilon’s Pledge to the ‘Islamic State’

The ASG is linked to Al Qaeda which had provided it with some training and funding. It is also connected to the Indonesian terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) which provided it with connections to Southeast Asian terrorist groups. However, in July 2014 a video was posted by the ASG splinter group under Hapilon on YouTube, which indicated his realignment with the so-called Islamic State (IS) (Ressa 2014). In the video, Hapilon was surrounded by masked men who swore allegiance (*bay’ah*) to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In December 2015 and June 2016, IS released videos showing IS’ acceptance of *bay’ah* by various battalions under Hapilon. The June 2016 video also called upon IS followers in Southeast Asia to go to the Philippines if they cannot travel to Syria (Geronimo 2016). Significantly, the call was made by a Malaysian jihadist who also encouraged jihadists to fight under Hapilon’s leadership, an indication of Hapilon’s growing regional stature.

Abu Sayyaf to ‘Islamic State’ brand of terrorism

IS Philippines is known for their kidnap-for-ransom tactics, with captives being beheaded if the ransom is not paid. Two Canadians were beheaded by ASG in April and June 2016 (Ullah, Luu, and Dewan 2016). Malaysian and Indonesian seafarers are also often abducted in the southern Philippine seas. In October 2016, ASG hijacked a South Korean cargo ship and in November 2016, the Vietnamese cargo vessel M/V Royal 16. ASG has reportedly amassed PhP 353 million (USD 7.3 million) ransom money just in the first six months of 2016 (Associated Press 2016). The financial windfall empowers the terrorists, replenishing their resources and enabling more terrorist attacks.

Impact of President Duterte’s Administration

The threat posed by the IS enclave may be mitigated by the initiation of an all-out military offensive ordered by newly-elected President

“IS Philippines is known for their kidnap-for-ransom tactics, with captives being beheaded if the ransom is not paid.”

Rodrigo Duterte. He has made it his top priority to eliminate the violent groups operating in the country, including ASG and those believed to have ties with IS (AFP 2016).

On 2 September 2016, following the Davao night market bomb explosion which killed 15 people and injured 70, Duterte ordered 7,000 soldiers to be deployed to Sulu to fight the 400-strong ASG (Santos 2016). He had earlier ordered the armed forces to destroy ASG after it beheaded an 18-year-old youth when the family failed to pay ransom money. Duterte declared a “state of lawlessness” on 3 September giving the armed forces powers of law enforcement (S. Perez 2016). The military offensive is producing favourable results with 94 ASG members already neutralised (Laude 2016). The government has also seized a number of speedboats and watercrafts of the ASG (Ager 2016) and PhP 6 million worth of firearms in Manila intended for the ASG (Roxas 2016). The Philippines is also strengthening joint military patrols of its air and seas with Malaysia and Indonesia to counter maritime crime and terrorism (The Straits Times 2016 and Mangosing 2016b).

It remains to be seen whether increased tri-border patrolling would reduce the number of kidnappings in the Sulu Sea.

Conclusion

Isnlon Hapilon is currently the face of terrorism in Southeast Asia in the same manner that southern Philippines is the current nucleus of the ‘Islamic State’ in the region. An IS enclave in the Sulu Archipelago presents a security threat not only to the Philippines but also to Southeast Asia. The number and strength of jihadist battalions would increase and so too the number

of hijackings and kidnappings. Training camps would be set up for the jihadists, instructing them in armed combat and bomb-making. Foreign jihadists from the region would be attracted to South Philippines to fight under Hapilon's leadership if they cannot travel to the Levant. It is therefore imperative that the military neutralise the threat posed by IS Philippines and ASG.

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‘ISLAMIC STATE’: SOWING THE SEEDS OF ITS OWN DESTRUCTION

MOHAMMED SINAN SIYECH

The rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) or Daesh in 2014 was extraordinary and far beyond anything governments and intelligence agencies had anticipated. Yet the group had sowed the seeds of its own destruction with its over-ambitious if unrealistic religio-political goals, self-defeating strategies and bizarre practices. Still, IS’ resilience should not be underestimated; much remains to be done to ensure that IS does not recover from its present setbacks.

Introduction

Thirty months after the declaration of the so-called caliphate, IS’ state-building enterprise appears to be crumbling with the continuing loss of territory, towns and cities in Iraq and Syria. Revenue has dropped and so has the number of foreign fighters joining IS, from 2,000 recruits every month to less than 50 (Witte 2016). IS now has to contend with desertions and fighting between foreign and local fighters. The situation is critical enough for IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to appeal to them in a 32-minute long audio message on 3 November not to be in “disputation and disagreement between yourselves”. He implored them not to despair and retreat from the frontlines. He also had to beseech his fighters not to disagree with their leaders, and to obey them “as an act of worship” to God (Rumiyah 2016). Al-Baghdadi’s message has been reproduced verbatim in the latest issue of IS monthly magazine, *Rumiyah*, published on 13 November.

Coalition forces in Iraq have also been advancing to victory at a rate faster than expected. After taking over major cities and towns like Fallujah and Ramadi, they are now poised to take over IS Iraqi ‘capital’ Mosul. This battle narrative is repeated in Syria where IS own *de facto* capital Raqqa is under attack. After transforming itself from a guerilla force to a state-building entity with a sizeable territory, IS is now looking at the prospect of reverting back to being an insurgent movement. While some militant groups have succeeded in forming states or quasi-states or becoming internationally-recognised non-state actors, IS has dug its own grave right from the beginning with its self-defeating ideology of perpetual war, unrealistic goals and atrocious practices. It is now reaping the seeds of its own destruction sown since 2014. Three of its self-defeating strategies merit discussion.

Ideology of Perpetual Conflict

IS is committed to its ideology of waging offensive jihad to establish God’s rule on earth (*Hakimiyya*). It has declared in its magazine *Dabiq* (Dabiq a 2014) that “The flag of Khilāfah will rise over Makkah and al-Madīnah... Baytul-Maqdis [Jerusalem] and Rome.... [and will] expand until it covers all eastern and western extents of the Earth...” A map circulated online shortly after the declaration of the caliphate in June 2014 shows a 5-year-plan to extend the caliphate into South Europe (including Spain, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria and Austria), Central and North Africa, Central Asia (including Xinjiang in China) and South Asia (Hall 2014). IS’ plans to establish a global caliphate necessitates going to war against every country near and far, starting with neighbouring countries like Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, before Western countries. To IS, all of them are countries of the ‘crusaders’, ‘disbelievers’ or ‘apostates’ which have to be defeated

and subjugated. In his article “What ISIS Really Wants”, Graeme Wood writes that IS “rejects peace as a matter of principle” and “it hungers for genocide” (Wood 2015). The group “specifically rejects territorial limits to its power” and it “cannot be satisfied without forcibly changing the very contours of the current international order” (Powell 2015).

To advance its religious and territorial ambitions, IS conquered large swathes of lands, towns and cities in Iraq and Syria, and established wilayats (provinces) in conflict zones such as Libya, Sinai Peninsula (in Egypt), Yemen and the Khorasan. IS also appointed emirs (leaders) for ‘soldiers of the caliphate’ in Bangladesh, the Philippines and elsewhere. By establishing a ‘state’ with territory and aiming to expand into a global caliphate, IS set itself up as a target for destruction by the affected countries and their allies, the outcome Al Qaeda leaders warned IS predecessors about. According to William McCants, Osama bin Laden had opposed the creation of a caliphate when the question was raised in 2004 by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the emir of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI, the forerunner of IS). Osama felt that “moving too soon for power in Iraq and Yemen... would lead to premature defeat”. However, the hotheads in AQI went ahead to declare the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in October 2006 which eventually grew to become the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and IS (McCants, 2015; Ignatius, 2015).

IS is now facing ferocious attacks from a coalition of 67 countries led by the US on the one hand and Russia and Iran on the other, and is now in retreat. IS is expected to be ousted from Mosul and Raqqa within months. It is unlikely that IS will be able to withstand the onslaught for long or prolong its resistance, not to mention function in any way as a ‘state’. It will be forced to abandon its slogan of “remaining and expanding” as it has no state or benefactor that would give it political, financial or military support. IS has no political legitimacy in the international world order, and will survive for a while more as a rogue ‘state’ before its eventual collapse.

Challenging the Muslim World

Neither does IS have any legitimacy in the Muslim world which it has also effectively antagonised. Through its practice of *takfirism* (ex-communication), it has branded not only Shiites and Alawites as apostates, but also all Sunni

“ IS is now facing ferocious attacks from a coalition of 67 countries led by the US on the one hand and Russia and Iran on the other, and is now in retreat. ”

Muslims (about 1.5 billion) who do not share IS Salafi-jihadi ideology and pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi as ‘commander of the faithful’, a radical departure from the approach of its predecessor, Al Qaeda. IS top strategist and spokesman Abu Mohamed al-Adnani (killed in a US drone attack in August 2016) warned all Muslims to obey al-Baghdadi and “ordered his fighters to ‘split the head’ and ‘strike the neck’ of anyone who breaks the ranks and does not submit to the will of the new caliphate” (Gerges 2016).

IS has also provoked the Muslim world with its gross distortions and misinterpretations of religious texts and violation of Islamic doctrines and practices. It resurrected the caliphate without the consensus of the Muslims, re-introduced slavery (a practice that has been abolished), forced people to convert and carried out torture and desecrations. They also mounted offensive jihad and suicide bombings, and perpetrated gruesome executions in contravention of Islamic teachings.

Consequently, IS has earned itself fatwas (religious edicts) declaring it as illegitimate, extreme, deviant and even heretical from Muslim scholars, clerics and leaders across the theological spectrum. An open ‘Letter to Baghdadi’ issued in September 2014 by over 120 prominent religious scholars around the world gave a point-by-point refutation of IS ideology, declaring it as wrong, illegitimate and un-Islamic. In India, following the deadly Paris attacks in November 2015 (130 people killed), nearly 70,000 Indian Muslim clerics issued a fatwa against IS and other terror groups in December 2015, saying they are “not Islamic

organizations” and a threat to humanity (The Independent 2015). In Bangladesh, more than 100,000 Muslim scholars, legal experts and clerics signed a fatwa condemning terrorism and militancy in the wake of the IS attack in Gulshan, Dhaka in June 2016 (VOA News 2016). IS has ignored the many denunciations from the Muslim world and instead branded some of the prominent critics as “apostates” deserving of death in one of the issues of its monthly magazine *Dabiq* (Dabiq 2016b).

Ideology of Hate and Savagery

Baghdadi and his inner circle rely particularly on extreme Salafi-jihadist manifestos that, according to Fawas Gerges in his book *ISIS: A History*, represent “the degeneration of the Salafi-jihadist ideology into *Fiqh al-Damaa* (the jurisprudence of blood”). IS has committed numerous atrocities against civilians and fighters, involving indiscriminate killings and brutalities, wrong implementation of Islamic penalties (*hudud*), lootings, mass expulsions and enslavement (Yaqoubi 2016). It takes great pride in committing them and being seen as a violent and ruthless organisation. Many of the gruesome beheadings and mass executions were captured on video and disseminated online through its propaganda outlets. IS ‘founder’, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was killed in a US drone attack in June 2006, was reputed to have been behind many of the beheadings, hostage-takings and suicide bombings. Al-Qaeda leader Zawahiri had warned Zarqawi in July 2005 that his “beheading and slaughtering of hostages is bad propaganda that only plays into the hands of their enemies” (Gerges 2016). He reminded Zarqawi against attacking Shiites and alienating the Muslim masses.

IS’ brutalities have continued under al-Baghdadi for whom nothing is sacred or off-limits. Prisoners and anti-IS elements have been beheaded and slaughtered, their bodies mutilated and their heads paraded or put on spikes to ward off attackers and warn dissenters. Some were tortured, electrocuted and shot in the head or crucified. Mass graves have been discovered and chemical weapons have been used against opposing forces. Many of the executions are broadcasted online in video clips and lurid photos, arousing great consternation and abhorrence around the world. Muslims and non-Muslims are aghast at IS brazen display of barbarism and crimes against humanity carried out in the name of Islam.

“ Given IS’ short-sighted and self-defeating strategies, it will not be long before its state-building project crumbles. ”

IS’ atrocities and dead-end policies have also aroused internal dissension among the people it governs. Many are unhappy with the strict and austere lifestyle imposed on them. At places where IS has withdrawn, some people are shaving off their beards and wearing western clothes; some women are also reported to have burnt their veils and discarded their black *niqabs*. (Dearden 2016) Within IS-controlled territories, a few residents and moles deep within the group’s top echelons have found courage to mount resistance, targeting IS leaders and top commanders and providing intelligence against IS. This has created a sense of paranoia among the group and the leader Baghdadi who reportedly keeps his suicide vest at hand to resist capture and shifts locations quite frequently (Nakhoul 2016).

IS: Not to be Underestimated

Given IS’ short-sighted and self-defeating strategies, it will not be long before its state-building project crumbles. But it is too early to write IS’ obituary. While the group will lose its territory in Iraq and Syria, its capacity to conduct attacks in Iraq and elsewhere will not be diminished. IS still has some of the best ex-Baathist military generals from Saddam’s army as well as experienced fighters from the Chechen and Afghan wars; its local fighters also have the capacity to melt into the civilian population and operate surreptitiously as IS underground terrorist cells. It should be recalled that the Islamic State in Iraq (IS’ predecessor) was previously written off after the ‘Anbar Awakening’ of 2008 till the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011. The movement however bounced back much stronger than before by exploiting the dire socio-economic conditions of the country and the

oppressive sectarian policies pursued by Nouri al-Maliki's government. Riding the wave of unrest, IS succeeded in extending itself into Syria and forming ISIS in 2013, and establishing the so-called caliphate in June 2014.

IS also has other means of keeping its flag flying. It has used its sophisticated online propaganda machinery to propagate its ideology of hate and violence to influence the disgruntled and alienated around the world. 'Soldiers of the caliphate' also remain operational in IS *wilayats* (outside Iraq and Syria) and armed enclaves from Africa to South and Southeast Asia. IS' growing presence and terror activities in Khorasan, for instance, is especially concerning. A joint suicide-bombing in Kabul in July 2016 killed 80 people and injured over 250 people (Visser 2016); more recently, IS militants killed 30 abducted civilians in central Afghanistan (The Independent 2016).

The Future

Just as Al Qaeda was dispersed following the American-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, IS may go underground and engage in terrorist activities in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere after the collapse of its caliphate project. The publication of *Rumiyah* (or Rome in Arabic) since early September this year gives further hints about IS' future directions, moving outwards from Dabiq (northern Syria) to Constantinople (Istanbul) and Rome (representing the West), to create an alternative or new battle space outside the Levant (Rumiyah 1 2016). With IS-held territories under attack from Turkish forces, al-Baghdadi has recently called on his fighters to attack Turkey, saying that "it has become a target for your operations and priority for your jihad" (Rumiyah 3 2016). *Rumiyah* editorial echoes the call, urging IS fighters to attack Turkey's military, police, judges, imams, scholars and supporters of the ruling party and allies of President Tayyip Erdogan. For good measure, al-Baghdadi has urged his supporters who could not come to Iraq or Syria, to go to one of the *wilayats* to carry on the struggle (Rumiyah 3).

Given these developments and IS future directions, the Iraqi government will do well not to repeat the mistakes of Maliki's government and provide IS with the grounds to reignite the sectarian clashes of the past. Post-conflict stabilisation measures, reconstruction of cities, delivery of goods and services and addressing Sunni political grievances will be essential to

ensure that the costly re-conquest of Sunni lands in the last one year remain durable and not in vain.

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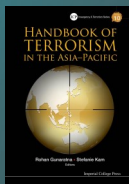
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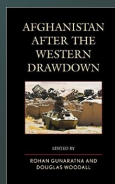


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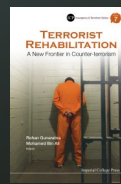
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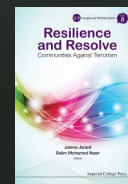
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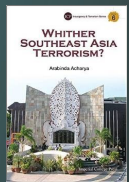
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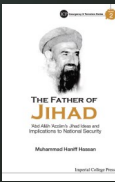
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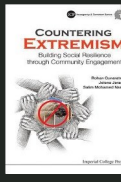
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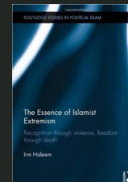
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