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# INDONESIAN AND MALAYSIAN SUPPORT FOR THE ISLAMIC STATE

## (FINAL REPORT)

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This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Greg Fealy, with the Malaysia sections by John Funston, Management Systems International.

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(FINAL REPORT)



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## ACRONYMS

AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIN	<i>Badan Intelijen Negara</i> ; State Intelligence Agency
BNPT	<i>Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme</i> ; National Counter-Terrorism Agency
Densus 88	<i>Detasemen Khusus 88</i> ; Special Detachment 88
FAKSI	<i>Forum Aktivistis Syariah Islam</i> ; Islamic Sharia Activists' Forum
Gema Salam	<i>Gerakan Mahasiswa Untuk Syariah Islam</i> ; Students' Movement for Islamic Law
IPAC	Institute of Policy and Conflict
ISA	Internal Security Act (Malaysia)
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
JAS	<i>Jamaah Anshorus Syariah</i>
JAT	<i>Jamaah Anshorut Taubid</i>
JI	<i>Jemaah Islamiyah</i>
KMM	<i>Kumpulan Mujahedeen Malaysia</i> ; Malaysian Holy War Fighters' Organization
MIB	<i>Mujahidin Indonesia Barat</i> ; West Indonesia Holy War Fighters
MIT	<i>Mujahidin Indonesia Timur</i> ; East Indonesia Holy War Fighters
MMI	<i>Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia</i>
NU	<i>Nabdlatul Ulama</i>
PAS	<i>Parti Islam se-Malaysia</i> ; Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party
UMNO	United Malays National Organization

## GLOSSARY

<i>Ajnad al-Sham</i>	Greater Syria Union
<i>Hudud</i>	Crimes against God
<i>Kafir</i>	Infidel
<i>Mantiqi</i>	JI Regional Command
<i>Pesantren</i>	Islamic boarding school

*Sham* Arabic term for Greater Syria  
*Takfir Mu-ayyan* Apostasy based on an individual's institutional affiliation.  
*Thaghut* Idolatrous

# MAP OF MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has had a dramatic impact on the jihadist community in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, which between them have almost 95 percent of the region's Muslim population. First, it has further radicalized those sections of the jihadist community that were already extremist in disposition, as well as inspiring a new generation of young recruits to its cause. Second, it has attracted hundreds of jihadists from Indonesia and Malaysia to fight in Syria and Iraq, though they form just a few percent of the estimated 30,000 foreign fighters currently serving in the Islamic State. Third, it has aroused antipathy in the broader Muslim community leading to widespread condemnation of ISIS's doctrine, its proclamation of a caliphate and its brutality on the battlefield, especially towards fellow Muslims but also to non-Muslim civilians within its borders. Fourth, the responses of the Indonesian and Malaysian states have been more emphatic than for any previous jihadist threat, with record levels of funding and government resources devoted to counter-terrorism efforts.

Despite these reactions for and against ISIS, the Islamic State has yet to pose a significantly increased threat to regional security, though it clearly has the potential to do so. One of the main reasons for the limited ISIS threat is that relatively few Indonesian or Malaysian fighters have returned to their home countries. This seems to be attributable to the fact that the ISIS leadership currently prefers its foreign fighters to remain in Syria and Iraq to defend and expand the caliphate, rather than return to Southeast Asia and wage violent jihad there. Most of the Indonesian and Malaysian fighters also appear content to remain in the Middle East, believing that Syria and Iraq form the most important site in the world for armed struggle in the name of Islam. They would prefer to die as martyrs in the Islamic State than return home to a jihad that appears less consequential than that being waged in the Middle East.

However, a change in this situation could come at any time. If the Islamic State were to falter and begin suffering major defeats and loss of territory, or if its leadership decided to open up new fronts in Southeast Asia, large numbers of battle-hardened, doctrinally-radicalized and militarily-skilled fighters could pour back into Indonesia and Malaysia to undertake operations or to recruit and train others to do so. A further risk is that some of the many dozens of would-be ISIS fighters who are unable to leave their home countries due to government policies preventing their departure could decide to launch domestic attacks, most likely against officials, but also, possibly, against the general community or foreigners. Malaysia may be a more likely target since plans to conduct militant operations in Malaysia have already been reported. And in a recent development both Indonesia and Malaysia have been mentioned as possible targets in an ISIS publication.

The precise level of support for ISIS is difficult to ascertain. Official figures on the number of fighters and actively supportive partisans of ISIS vary greatly and some government spokespeople appear inclined to disseminate inflated statistics in order to galvanize public reactions. We believe that somewhere in the order of 300 to 450 Indonesian and Malaysian fighters have gone to Syria and Iraq, well over half of whom have joined ISIS. The most reliable figures for Indonesian foreign fighters come from Detachment 88, the special counter-terrorism unit within the Indonesian Police. In June 2015, it documented 202 cases of Indonesian fighters in the Middle East, but officials admit the real figure could be dozens higher than this. The Institute of Policy and Conflict (IPAC), the Jakarta-based non-governmental research center that is doing the most authoritative analysis of Indonesian terrorism issues, believes that between 250 and 300 local jihadists may be fighting with ISIS. For Malaysia, the latest official figures state that 154 fighters are in Syria and Iraq, though other sources believe that 80-100 is the more likely total. Of these hundreds of Indonesian and Malaysian fighters, probably only several dozen have returned home.

Recruits to ISIS come from a diverse range of age, educational, vocational and socio-economic backgrounds. Teenagers have joined ISIS, as have jihadists in their 50s. Some are junior or secondary school dropouts, others have graduate qualifications. Some are itinerant workers, but others have successful professional careers as doctors, teachers, engineers and public servants. In short, there is no single profile for ISIS recruits.

What is reasonably clear is that most recruits have become involved in the organization via their involvement in existing radical groups or because they have personally known activists in such groups. This is particularly the case in Indonesia, where jihadist groups that pre-date ISIS's formation in 2013 have played a crucial role in popularizing the Islamic state and facilitating the selection and departure of recruits to Syria and Iraq. Social media is important in promoting ISIS beliefs and in radicalizing new recruits but it is not, in Indonesia, the sole or even critical conduit for entering the Islamic State. In Malaysia, where jihadists are organizationally weak, the Internet appears to play a greater role.

Many of the Indonesian fighters and some of the Malaysians who join ISIS initially become members of a special military unit for training Southeast Asian fighters currently known as *Majmu'ah Persiapan al-Arkhabili* (better known by its previous title, *Katibah Nusantara*). Originally thought to contain in excess of one hundred trainees, more recent information suggests that the figure might be closer to thirty or forty. After several months of military, Arabic and doctrinal training they join ISIS forces in roles ranging from front-line soldiers and suicide bombers to guards and administrators. One issue for security agencies is the possibility that *Katibah* fighters could form their own network if they later returned to Southeast Asia. Estimates of the number of casualties vary widely but our data suggests that around 60 Indonesians and Malaysians have died so far in battle, with perhaps as many of 20 percent killing themselves in suicide bombings.

The motivations for jihadists who join ISIS are manifold. Many are drawn to the success of ISIS's military campaign against what are seen as enemies of the true faith, such as Shiites, Christians, and "idolatrous" and "deviant" Sunni Muslims who are backed by the "infidel" West and Israel. The fact that ISIS has won control of a large tract of territory and has proclaimed the creation of a caliphate within which Islamic law is applied has great symbolic value for radical Muslims. They interpret ISIS's against-the-odds victories as evidence of divine favor and the correctness of its strategy. Eschatological factors also feature prominently in the discourses of those who have gone, or want to go, to Syria and Iraq. They believe that the current sequence of events in the Middle East, in which repressive authoritarian regimes were brought down by the Arab Spring, only to be replaced by new "un-Islamic" regimes, is the partial fulfillment of classical Islamic prophecies regarding the End of Time. According to such texts, Islam's final triumph over the forces of unbelief will take place in the Greater Syria region. For many of ISIS's foreign fighters, there is no more glorious battle in which to risk one's life than that which will lead to the Day of Judgment and salvation for the righteous. Some Indonesian and Malaysian fighters are less taken with the ideological or apocalyptic aspects of the ISIS struggle but are attracted by the more simply defined notion that this is a Just War in which Muslims have to defend their co-religionists against repression and mortal threat. For another group of fighters, ISIS is attractive because it offers higher pay than they could hope for in Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as good and cheap health and welfare services.

In neither Indonesia nor Malaysia, does ISIS have an organizational structure. Instead, it relies upon other jihadist groups and networks to support it. There are at least a dozen Indonesian jihadist organizations that have aligned themselves with ISIS, seven of which provide what can be regarded as consequential support. Most of these organizations have had members involved in prior acts of violent extremism, though none is formally proscribed. The central figure connecting this diverse collection of jihadist groups together is Aman Abdurrahman, Indonesia's most militant and influential jihadist ideologue. Currently in jail for terrorism-related offences, Aman has become the chief advocate of ISIS and its doctrine. His writings are widely distributed and have shaped the thinking of a great many radical groups. Another high-profile ISIS proponent is Santoso, whose small band of fighters controls a patch of territory in remote Central Sulawesi. Santoso has symbolic significance because his group is committed to terrorism against domestic targets, but he is far less important in popularizing ISIS's goals and mobilizing networks than is Aman.

The Indonesian and Malaysian governments have responded energetically but not always effectively to the ISIS threat. In both countries, the police counter-terrorism units have a very good record of apprehending and prosecuting terrorists, often when attacks are being planned. Indonesia's police have one of the best records in the world for detection and detention of jihadists, with more than 1,000 apprehended over the past 13 years. De-radicalization programs for terrorists, especially those in jail, and broader community anti-

radicalization campaigns, however, leave much to be desired. Indonesia's crowded and under-resourced prisons have little capacity to provide professional de-radicalization services, and those that are available are often poorly designed and have little impact on the inmates who participate. The failure of prison programs is significant given that in the three-year period from 2013; almost 100 detainees are due for release, some of who are reportedly more radical than when they were convicted. Indonesia's main counter-terrorism agency, BNPT, has been a disappointment. Although well funded and staffed with officials from the police, military and intelligence agencies, it has failed to produce programs that reach those communities most vulnerable to terrorist recruitment. Instead, much of its funding is directed to large mainstream Muslim organizations and local counter-terrorism committees that have little understanding of ISIS or its ideology. These mainstream Islamic groups are regarded by jihadists as part of the problem, not part of the solution to what ails the Muslim community. The potential utility of the growing involvement of Indonesia's military, particularly the army, in counter-terrorism activities is questionable. Military officers tend to regard terrorism as a consequence of insufficient nationalism and are also inclined to use heavy-handed measures in the field to apprehend jihadists or eliminate threats. Such actions can further alienate and radicalize prospective jihadists.

## Implications for the US Government

The principal implications for the US government of the growing influence of ISIS on the jihadist community in Southeast Asia are three-fold: First, there is the risk that increasing numbers of Indonesians and Malaysians will actively support ISIS or *al-Nusra*, including but not limited to traveling to the Middle East to join the jihadist fight there. Second, there is the risk that Indonesian and Malaysian jihadists who fight in the Middle East will bring their skills and dedication back to Southeast Asia, thereby raising the threat of terrorist attack in their home countries. Third, there is the risk that Indonesians and Malaysians inspired by the goals of the Islamic State but who cannot or will not travel to the Middle East will renew or initiate jihadist violence in their own countries (or perhaps elsewhere in Southeast Asia).

Overall, support for ISIS in Indonesia and Malaysia currently is confined to pockets of the Islamic community, and this is only likely to change for the worse if ISIS (a) scores significant new military victories or (b) implodes, resulting in hundreds of fighters returning to Indonesia and Malaysia, or (c) directs its Southeast Asian fighters to conduct violent attacks at home. There is not a high probability of these occurring within the next year or so.

What role can and should the US government play? The opportunities to assist substantively with counter-terrorism policing and intelligence are much reduced compared to 10-15 years ago. Moreover, the scope for US government engagement in counter-terrorism efforts is limited, given that many Muslim organizations are wary of western funding or advice, especially in matters relating to Islam and its interpretation.

At the broadest level, the US government should encourage and support genuinely moderate domestic Islamic agendas in both Indonesia and Malaysia. The State Department's recent annual reporting on religious rights in Indonesia and Malaysia records declining tolerance in both nations. Over the past decade successive Indonesian governments have paid lip service to religious tolerance but have not vigorously responded to sectarian groups that engage in vigilante violence towards religious minorities. There is some research indicating that members of vigilante Islamist groups are prone to recruitment by more extreme movements, including those that are pro-ISIS. In the Malaysian case, the moderate Islamic image it projects internationally is not reflected in domestic policy that is increasingly sectarian and hostile, not only to minority religious rights but also to progressive Muslim views.

The USG needs to keep in mind that ISIS has revitalized (but also divided) the jihadist community in Southeast Asia. This represents a significant new dynamic which has the potential to evolve in difficult-to-predict ways. Given this, it will be important for the USG to have a nuanced understanding of the Islamic State's influence on Islamic discourse in Indonesia and Malaysia. And it will be important to have the

capacity to monitor the flow of Indonesians and Malaysians to the Middle East as well as the reverse flow of returnees.

# I. INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the impact of the Syrian conflict and particularly the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) on Indonesia and Malaysia. Over the past two years, ISIS has rapidly become the most dangerous of transnational influences on jihadism in Southeast Asia. It has recruited and mobilized hundreds of Southeast Asian fighters for military and other service in Syria and Iraq and has drawn pledges of loyalty from several thousand jihadists in the region. Pro-ISIS websites and publications attract tens of thousands of readers and its distinctive black-and-white flag has become iconic for those Muslims who reject the prevailing political systems and religious orthodoxies in Indonesia and Malaysia. Whatever its longer-term fate, ISIS has been a significant phenomenon in Southeast Asian Islamic life since late 2013. We will examine these various aspects of ISIS, but also look at the reaction from other sections of the Muslim community, especially the jihadist groups and networks that have been largely regional in focus until recently. Many of these anti-ISIS groups have also “invested” in the Syrian conflict, sending fighters, humanitarian workers and money. Their opposition to ISIS makes them almost as important a part of this story as the Islamic State itself.

## The Rise of ISIS

The emergence of ISIS has its immediate origins in the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war that followed it in 2011; but its deeper roots can be traced to developments within transnational jihadism and particularly *al-Qaeda's* Iraqi network in the early 2000s. One of *al-Qaeda's* most militant affiliates was the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI but also known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, AQI). Particularly under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi between 2004 and 2006, ISI became feared for its brutal attacks on Shi'ite Iraqi civilians and officials and even earned the ire of al-Qaeda leaders for what was seen as a counterproductive level of violence that was alienating even Sunni communities in Iraq. Following Zarqawi's death in 2006, ISI went into decline. In 2010, it was taken over by a relatively young and secretive Islamic scholar, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

What enabled the swift rise of ISIS was the outbreak of conflict in Syria in March 2011 as the reformist aspirations of the Arab Spring swept across the Middle East. Sunni Syrians, who had long been resentful of the repressive and corrupt Shia-dominated regime of Bashar al-Assad rose up in protest, eventually taking up arms as the government refused to resign or negotiate. What followed was a bloody conflict that has probably cost the lives of more than 200,000 people and shows no signs of abating. Importantly for the context of this report, it was the Syrian civil war that provided the opportunity for al-Baghdadi to expand ISI. He deployed its fighters from Iraq to Syria in August 2011 and also provided funding for the establishment of *Jabhat al-Nusra* as *al-Qaeda's* Syrian affiliate. In April 2013, he announced the formation of ISIS and stated that *al-Nusra* would be merged with the Islamic State. The *al-Nusra* leadership rejected al-Baghdadi's statement and appealed for intervention by *al-Qaeda's* emir, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Zawahiri declared that al-Baghdadi's command was confined to Iraq, at which point al-Baghdadi split from *al-Nusra*, taking an estimated 70-80 percent of its foreign fighters with him. From late 2013, ISIS and *al-Nusra* forces were engaged in open conflict, with the latter suffering a series of defeats in early 2014. In February 2014, *al-Qaeda* severed all ties with ISIS. On June 29, 2014, ISIS pronounced the creation of a global caliphate with al-Baghdadi as its paramount leader. According the United Nations, ISIS now has in excess of 30,000 foreign fighters drawn from more than 100 nations. ISIS claims to have territorial branches in Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Caucasus.

## Methodology and Sources

This report is based primarily on publicly available sources regarding ISIS and rival organizations. The main sources have been the reports of IPAC in Jakarta, that have consistently provided the most detailed and reliable narratives and analysis of ISIS-related events in Indonesia, with some reference also to Malaysia. The Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore has also provided a number of useful analytical

pieces on ISIS in the region. During ten days of fieldwork in Jakarta in June 2015, Greg Fealy conducted interviews with IPAC analysts, ex-jihadists, journalists and NGO researchers specializing in jihadist groups, academics, and a number of counter-terrorism officials from the Indonesian Police and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT). Considerable use was also made of jihadist websites and also magazines. Last of all, a variety of police and court documents containing depositions and testimony of arrested jihadists were consulted. Associate Professor Greg Fealy, from the Department of Political and Social Change at the Australian National University, is the primary author of this report and Dr John Funston, visiting fellow at the Coral Bell School of Asia-Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University, has contributed the Malaysia sections.

## II. CURRENT STATUS

### Scale of the Problem

Accurate information on the number of Indonesians and Malaysians involved in fighting for or in various other ways supporting ISIS is difficult to obtain. It appears that the Indonesian and Malaysian governments have reliable data on only specific aspects of their citizens' participation in Syria and Iraq, and many of their public pronouncements on the subject are based at least partly on estimates from fragmentary information. Senior officials admit that there are sizeable numbers of fighters who surreptitiously depart for Syria and Iraq without their knowledge, usually transiting through other countries in the Middle East. Often their presence in Syria or Iraq only becomes known to authorities when they appear on social media or when news emerges that they have been killed. An additional problem is that government officials in Indonesia and Malaysia release improbably high figures for the number of their citizens fighting with ISIS without providing any supporting information. Such statements appear designed to capture public attention regarding the magnitude of the ISIS problem. Official figures are more often indicative than precise and a good deal of caution is needed when citing them.

### Indonesian and Malaysian Fighters in Syria and Iraq

In Indonesia, government officials have produced a wide array of figures for the number of their citizens who have gone to Syria and Iraq, many of them lack credibility. Senior officers from the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), for example, declared in November 2014 that some 300 Indonesians had joined ISIS in the Middle East, and just a month later, that more than 500 had departed, though no data has been released that allows independent scrutiny of these figures.<sup>1</sup> It is probable that the BNPT figures include all movements of Indonesians to the conflict, including fighters' family members, those involved in humanitarian and other non-fighting roles, and individuals who may have returned to the Islamic State from Southeast Asia multiple times. Privately, some BNPT staff members admit that these figures are little more than guesstimates. Some Singaporean researchers have put the number of Indonesians fighting for ISIS at 700 or more, but provided no details of how this number was arrived at.<sup>2</sup>

The most reliable official data comes from the Indonesian Police's specialist counter-terrorism unit Detachment 88 (commonly known as Densus). Its figures include only people for whom they have confirmed names and evidence of travel to Syria and Iraq. As of mid-June 2015, Densus put the number of Indonesian fighters at 202. Counter-terrorism police acknowledge that the real number is probably several dozen more than this. This estimate does not include the 30-40 thought to have died in battle, and police acknowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Nani Afrida, 'Alarming Rise in IS Support', *The Jakarta Post*, 8 December 2014; Dyah Ayu Pitaloka, '300 Indonesians Now with ISIS, Counterterrorism Official Says', *Jakarta Globe*, 14 November 2014; and Esther Tanquintic, 'Money Trail Implies Australians sending Terror Funds to Indonesia's Daesh Fighters', *International Business Times*, 25 March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Jasminder Singh, 'Katibah Nusantara: Islamic States Malay Archipelago Combat Unit', *RSIS Commentary*, number 126, 26 May 2015.

that there are probably many dozens of Indonesian jihadists in Syria about whom they have no information.<sup>3</sup> The respected IPAC in Jakarta, believes the likely number is about 250, but possibly as high as 300. We concur with this estimate.

The great majority of Indonesian fighters are with ISIS; but at least several dozen are fighting with armed groups opposed to the Islamic State. The largest non-ISIS contingent is with *Jabhat al-Nusra* (The Support Front [for the People of Greater Syria]), the main *al-Qaeda*-aligned force. Most *al-Nusra* recruits come via *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), the jihadist organization responsible for the 2002 Bali bombing and other mass casualty attacks, but disengaged from terrorist operations since the mid-2000s. Perhaps as many as 20-40 JI people have been involved in *al-Nusra* activities but the majority seems to have been humanitarian workers, translators and Islamic scholars rather than fighters.

Over the last year the estimates of the number of Malaysians fighting in Syria and Iraq have continued to change. A government White Paper released in November 2014 entitled “Towards Combating the Threat of Islamic State” (hereafter referred to as “the White Paper”) reported that as of October 31, 2014 there were 39: 17 with ISIS and 22 in *Ajnad al-Sham*, one of the larger anti-Assad rebel alliances in Syria.<sup>4</sup> In January 2015, Minister for Home Affairs (now also Deputy Prime Minister) Zahid said there were 67 in the war zone. In a later parliamentary reply, the Ministry stated there were 154 Malaysian members of ISIS as of May 7, 2015.<sup>5</sup> A number of other confidential sources have suggested that the most likely number is between 80 and 100.

Regardless of the specific figures, what is indisputable is that there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of Indonesians and Malaysians joining ISIS and other groups in Syria and Iraq since early 2014. Indonesian officials believe that the rate of departures has slowed in recent months due to successful intervention to prevent would-be recruits from leaving, though it is difficult to confirm this. The Malaysian government has also stepped up its efforts to halt the flow of ISIS recruits.

Many Indonesians and some Malaysians who join ISIS initially enter a special militia currently called the *Majmu'ah Persiapan al-Arkhability* (Archipelagic Preparation Group), but better known by its earlier name *Katibah Nusantara*, which was established in September 2014. It is based in al-Shadadi, al-Hasakah province of northeast Syria.<sup>6</sup> Its aim is to acclimatize and train Southeast Asian recruits to conditions in the Middle East. Trainees are given Arabic-language tuition, military training and ideological indoctrination so that they can readily enter military service with ISIS. Key leaders of the *Katibah* include the experienced Indonesian jihadists Bahrum Syah, Abu Jandal and Salim Mubarak – all three appear to have good standing with the ISIS central leadership. Its membership was initially thought to be about 100, but recent estimates place it at several dozen.<sup>7</sup> Following completion of training, *Katibah* graduates are sent off to a variety of functions within ISIS's forces, ranging from front line soldiers, suicide bombers, border and facilities guards; but the majority appear to be sent straight to battle zones. Some Malaysian fighters have been part of this unit but the main reported area of operations has been in the central western province of Hama.

Indonesian and Malaysian recruits have been involved in all aspects of fighting, including use of heavy weapons, bomb making and suicide bombings, and Malaysians have appeared on YouTube participating in beheadings. Some reports have also mentioned a group called *Mujabideen Jawi*, comprising recruits from

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with BNPT middle-ranking officer; and Sidney Jones, 'ISIS in Indonesia', *Strategic Review*, forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> 'Ke Arah Menangani Ancaman Kumpulan Islamic State' (Towards Combating the Threat of Islamic State). Tabled on 26 November, 2014. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/kertas%20putih%20ke%20arah%20menangani%20ancaman%20kumpulan%20islamic%20state.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> 'Survey: Malaysians more worried about climate change, global economy, than IS', *The Malay Mail Online*, 17 July 2015.

<sup>6</sup> 'ISIS fighters from Malaysia, Indonesia form military unit', *The Star*, 26 September, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> IPAC, 'Update on Indonesian and Malaysian Militia Unit in Syria', 6 October 2014; Jasminder Singh, 'Katibah Nusantara: Islamic States Malay Archipelago Combat Unit', *RSIS Commentary*, number 126, 26 May 2015; 'New IS militant wing for Malaysians, Indonesians uncovered', *The Malay Mail Online*, 4 March 2015; and Avaneesh Pandey, 'ISIS Planning Attacks in Southeast Asia through Local Wing 'Katibah Nusantara': Report', *International Business Times*, 29 May 2015.

Malaysia, Indonesia, southern Thailand and southern Philippines, but at most, this seems to be a loose coalition.<sup>8</sup>

The death toll among Indonesian and Malaysian fighters in Syria and Iraq, according to IPAC, is around 60, though information on many of the slain fighters is patchy and is often sourced to social media sites of uncertain reliability. Analysis of the list reveals that around 60 percent of deaths for which we have details occurred in Syria, with the remainder in Iraq. Most of the Indonesian fatalities have occurred since March 2015, and many of these have been at the hands of Kurdish forces following the deployment of Indonesian and Malaysian fighters to Mount Sinjar, in northern Iraq. According to Malaysia's Special Branch, eleven Malaysians have died in Syria and Iraq. Six Malaysians and five Indonesians have perished as suicide bombers. Three deaths were from *al-Nusra* (all Indonesian), at least three Malaysians have died fighting with Afnad al-Sham, and one other Indonesian was killed with the anti-ISIS *Suqor al-Izz* Brigade; all the remaining fatalities were fighting for ISIS.<sup>9</sup>

## Measuring Support for ISIS in Indonesia and Malaysia

The number of fighters going to Syria and Iraq provides a glimpse of the likely size of the broader support base for ISIS in Indonesia and Malaysia; but as with so many aspects of this movement, the figures are speculative at best. For Indonesia, it is commonly stated that there are between 1,000-2,000 people who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>10</sup> This is based on estimates of the number of people who attended public events during 2014 at which mass oaths were sworn to al-Baghdadi and the caliphate. Some of these events reportedly had as many as several hundred attendees. Such estimates are highly problematic. It is very likely that many of those attending did so out of curiosity or out of a vague attraction to the Islamic State. Given the fervent mood of the meetings, it may have been difficult for individuals to object to committing allegiance. Few of those in attendance probably had any firm plan to actively support ISIS and are best described as passive sympathizers. In Indonesia, such events where Muslims are urged to support oppressed brethren abroad are commonplace and past experience suggests that only a fraction of those pledging support actually do so, let alone departing for a foreign battle field.

Nonetheless, ISIS's success at recruiting fighters and support staff, as well as raising money to send jihadists from Indonesia to the Middle East is undeniable. In addition to the probable 250 to 300 people who have gone to Syria and Iraq, there are long queues of would-be fighters waiting to leave but unable either to depart due either to fear of prevention by Indonesian authorities or difficulty in obtaining the recommendation letter needed to enlist with ISIS forces in Syria.<sup>11</sup> It is indeed highly likely that several thousand people are actively engaged in pro-ISIS activities, be they recruitment, running websites, translating texts and propaganda materials, raising money, organizing travel, supporting families whose breadwinners are fighting in Syria or preaching on its behalf. Some of the ISIS-leaning websites, for example, claim to have had hundreds of thousands of views. One such is the *Millah Ibrahim* site that includes a counter recording almost 700,000 page views, among them 172,000 from Indonesia and 10,200 from Malaysia.<sup>12</sup> By the standards of extremist websites, this is a relatively high visitor rate.

While ISIS's support base has grown in Indonesia and quite possibly Malaysia over the past 18 months, this needs to be placed in a broader context. Even if the movement has several thousand followers, this still represents a small minority of each nation's jihadist community and a tiny fraction of the more than 235 million Muslims in Indonesia and Malaysia. Certainly, in Indonesia, as will be explained below, most

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<sup>8</sup> 'Jihadist says expect more M'sian suicide bombers', *Daily Express*, 12 January 2015.

<sup>9</sup> IPAC, 'Indonesian Deaths in Syria and Iraq', 1 June 2015. We are grateful to Sidney Jones for making this unpublished report available for the purposes of this report. Also, *The Malaysian Insider*, 11 May 2015.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, the interview with Monash University's Greg Barton on ABC's *4 Corners* program, 4 August 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2014/08/04/4057803.htm>; and 'ISIS mulai tanam pengaruh di Indonesia', *Kompas Online*, 2 August 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Sidney Jones, 'Changing Patterns of Support for Violent Extremism in Indonesia', PowerPoint presentation to Indonesia Study Group Seminar, Australian National University, Canberra, 20 March 2014

<sup>12</sup> See <https://millahibrahim.wordpress.com>. This is the only one of the main pro-ISIS sites to have a visitor counter.

committed jihadists oppose ISIS and refuse to recognize al-Baghdadi's caliphate. In addition, if the rates of ISIS recruitment are compared across countries, Indonesia ranks as one of the lowest. Assuming that there are 300 Indonesians in Syria and Iraq, this equates to 1.4 people per million Muslim citizens; for Malaysia the figure is 8.5 per million. By comparison, Australia has 14 per million, France 18, Belgium 40 and Tunisia 280.<sup>13</sup> However, it is noteworthy that in the ten years between 1985 and 1995, around 300-400 Indonesians and Malaysians trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan as anti-Soviet *mujabedeens*, and perhaps another 100-200 trained in camps in Mindanao, in the southern Philippines. Yet, within just two years, close to the same number have gone to Syria and Iraq.

## Returnees and Arrests

A critical issue is the number of returnees to Indonesia and Malaysia because of the threat these may pose to security and an increase in the terrorism threat. In the case of Indonesia, a distinction must be made here between those who go to Syria and Iraq to assist one of the anti-ISIS groups, most importantly *Jabhat al-Nusra*, and those joining ISIS. Most of the *al-Nusra* recruits are channeled through *Jemaah Islamiyah* networks and their primary purpose in going to the conflict zone is to gain skills and experience that they can bring back to Indonesia to serve the long-term goal of establishing an Islamic state. Of the estimated several dozen JI members that have gone to Syria, most have reportedly returned within between three and twelve months. To date, none of the JI returnees have been implicated in any planned violent operations in Indonesia.

A different dynamic has applied so far for the ISIS recruits in Syria and Iraq. So far, only about 10-15 are thought to have returned to Indonesia, and quite a few of these have been non-fighters who are involved in recruitment, fund raising and logistics. In the Malaysian case, the White Paper mentions five who returned from Syria. There have been only brief references to other returnees since then, with one described as the ringleader of a group of ISIS supporters arrested on April 5, 2015 and later convicted for planning attacks on Malaysian targets. The remarkable thing about both the Indonesian and Malaysian figures is that seemingly so few – around 5 percent -- of the 450 or so who have gone to Syria and Iraq, have returned to their homeland. The reasons for this will be discussed below.

The number of arrests provides another indicator of ISIS activity. In Indonesia, some 40 people have been arrested for pro-ISIS actions. Malaysian security services appear to have arrested a far greater number than their Indonesian counterparts. In April 2014, the first major operation against ISIS militants led to at least 16 arrests. In November of that year, Interior Minister Zahid announced that the figure had risen to 40. In January, reports said 51 had been arrested. Different reports in April and May mention figures ranging from 80 to 173.<sup>14</sup> In April alone 29 were arrested. Again, the trend seems to be upwards, but perhaps not to the extent of the highest of these estimates.

## Nature and Level of the ISIS Threat

The emergence of ISIS has raised the potential threat to Indonesia and Malaysia as well as to Western citizens and assets in both countries, but many officials and terrorism commentators tend to exaggerate the magnitude of the risk. ISIS has undoubtedly fired the imaginations of thousands of Indonesians and Malaysians, leading many of them to seek to fight for its cause or give financial, material or doctrinal support to those who do fight. But this does not automatically mean that ISIS groups constitute, at least for the moment, a significant security risk. It is worth noting that ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani issued his widely-publicized appeal 11 months ago to Muslims around the world to attack Westerners, particularly Americans, Australians, Canadians and the French, wherever, whenever and with whatever means they

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<sup>13</sup> Based on figures given in Jones, 'ISIS in Indonesia', *Strategic Review*, forthcoming.

<sup>14</sup> An observation by the *The Malaysian Insider*, in the article, 'DAP Youth leader calls Jamil Khir a chauvinist over lonely women comment', 17 April 2015.

could.<sup>15</sup> In early September 2015 both Indonesia and Malaysia were included among several countries listed as targets in the ISIS online publication *Dabiq*.<sup>16</sup> Abu Muhammad's call has prompted attacks in numerous countries, but not, so far, in either Indonesia or Malaysia. It remains to be seen whether or not this will change following the *Dabiq* reference. Since ISIS's emergence in 2013, there have been few terrorist plots uncovered in Indonesia and only a handful in Malaysia, if government statements there are to be believed. One effect of the Syrian conflict has been to shift the focus of Indonesian and Malaysian violent extremism from Southeast Asia to the Middle East.

The ISIS threat takes several forms. The first is that of ISIS returnees radicalizing vulnerable Muslims, passing on their military and operational skills to recruits and leading terrorist attacks against either domestic or foreign targets within Indonesia and Malaysia. Undoubtedly, ISIS fighters would have high cache among certain sections of the Muslim community due to their battle experience with the Islamic State and would be sought out by activists wanting to join the movement. Thus, they could not only have a galvanizing effect on susceptible Muslims but could also greatly raise the capacity for violence of existing groups.

But the reality is that few fighters are returning to Southeast Asia, as yet. The reasons for the lack of returnees can be found in the attitudes of both the ISIS leadership and their Southeast Asian recruits. ISIS leaders have so far evinced little interest in fomenting jihadist conflict in Indonesia or Malaysia and appear chiefly to view these countries as sources of recruits rather than sites for expanding violent operations.<sup>17</sup> For their part, Indonesians and Malaysians flocking to ISIS's banner prefer to wage jihad in Syria and Iraq, usually citing a combination of legal, theological and political reasons (discussed below). Judging by social media commentary on local ISIS webpages, Indonesians regard Syria and Iraq as the location of the most significant jihadist struggle in the world, where Muslims are locked in battle, perhaps apocalyptically so, with the faith's most dangerous enemies. By contrast, Indonesia is regarded as less consequential. If one is to die defending Islam, Syria and Iraq are more virtuous locations than Indonesia. A final factor deterring Indonesians from returning is the fear of arrest by Densus, particularly if they seek to engage in violent operations. This is testimony of the effectiveness of Indonesia's counter-terrorism policing. In Indonesia, there have only been a handful of arrests of returnees.

Malaysia's returnees, though small in number, appear more intent on engaging in attacks. There have been three roundups of militants – one in April 2014 and two in April 2015, where those arrested have allegedly planned to strike against the Malaysian government. In August 2014, the Special Branch assistant director-general Datuk Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay said that suspected militants arrested from April to June were formulating plans to bomb hotels, discotheques and a Malaysian brewery of Danish beer producer Carlsberg. At the time of arrest, however, they were only in the early planning stages. The White Paper reinforced this message, claiming information from these arrests showed that militants were planning attacks on entertainment centers, a beer factory and government offices in the administrative capital Putrajaya. In February 2015, Home Minister Zahid warned of intelligence that militants planned to kidnap tycoons and rob banks in Malaysia to finance their activities.

Malaysian government warnings gathered intensity during two mass arrests in April. Seventeen militants were rounded up in raids in Selangor and Kedah on April 5. According to police head Khalid, they planned to raise funds by robbing banks and kidnapping high profile people for ransom, and raid armed forces' installations and police stations to obtain weapons. Some group members wanted to establish a permanent cell to launch regular attacks in the country, with the ultimate aim of creating an ISIS-like Islamic state in Malaysia. Adding to government anxiety, the leader of the group, Murad Halimmuddin, was a member of an earlier terrorist group *Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia* (KMM) and a returnee from Syria; and two other members were, respectively, ex-KMM and a returnee. Finally, in raids on April 25-26 police arrested 12 people and declared

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<sup>15</sup> Yara Bayoumy, 'Isis urges more attacks on Western Unbelievers', *The Independent*, 24 September 2014.

<sup>16</sup> 'Police counter-terrorism unit says beefing up security after IS threatens attack on Malaysia', *AFP report in The Malay Mail Online*, 11 September 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, 'ISIS in Indonesia'.

they had foiled a terror plot, just hours before the 26th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in Kuala Lumpur. They seized an Islamic State flag and ingredients for explosives, including suspected ammonium nitrate, potassium nitrate, kerosene and possible detonator components, though officials admitted the quantities were sufficient only for a small bomb.

A second and growing threat for Indonesia and Malaysia is that would-be ISIS fighters who are unable to depart for Syria and Iraq because of government preventative measures turn their hostility towards their own countries. In Indonesia, there is evidence of lengthening queues of aspiring ISIS recruits who are waiting to go to the Middle East, many of whom have been studying the Islamic State's ideology and some of whom have also received some quasi-military training. Their frustration and resentment at the government's intervention could mean that, in lieu of fighting with ISIS, they undertake domestic attacks, most probably against security officials or possibly also against religious minorities such as Shias and Christians or foreigners. While no attacks of this nature have occurred as yet, the risk of them happening is rising.<sup>18</sup>

More generally, ISIS poses a threat for its ability to popularize extreme forms of jihadist activity that could lead to greater levels of intolerance and violence. One manifestation of this can be found in the heated debate within jihadist circles over the issue of apostatizing fellow Muslims. The more militant position, advocated by ISIS, is that of "institutional apostasy" (*takfir mu'ayyan*). This position holds that it is legitimate to attack Muslim who work for an "idolatrous" (*thagut*) state. By virtue of their official or institutional role, these Muslims can be declared apostate and killed. ISIS justified the slaying of non-ISIS Muslims as being in accord with *takfir mu'ayyan* and its Indonesian supporters promoted this view, including by advocating for targeting of Indonesian officials such as police, prosecutors and politicians. The more cautious position on apostasy asserts that decisions on whether a Muslim is heretical or not depends upon that person's individual piety. Apostasy can only be done on a case-by-case basis, not institutionally. If growing numbers of Indonesian jihadists can be persuaded that *takfir mu'ayyan* is legitimate, the prospect of attacks on Indonesian officials would become far greater.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, ISIS has sought to re-assert the validity of attacks on foreigners (the "far enemy," in common parlance,) something that has largely fallen from favor in Indonesia's jihadist community over the past half-decade.

Indonesian government officials have spoken of another threat from ISIS: that it will attract foreign fighters to the region. So far, these claims appear to have little basis. For example, in December 2014, the Coordinating Minister of Politics, Law and Security, Tedjo Edhy Purdijatno, told the press that there were 110 foreign ISIS fighters in Poso, though he gave no further details.<sup>20</sup> Subsequent research has revealed no evidence to support this. The only group of foreigners known to have travelled to Sulawesi was four Uighurs, three of whom were from Xinjiang and the fourth a Turkish citizen. All had met in Malaysia and travelled to Indonesia where police eventually arrested them as they sought to join forces with the pro-ISIS jihadist group led by Santoso (see below). It is not entirely clear why they chose to go to Sulawesi but it is possible that they wanted training there before going to Syria to fight with ISIS. The three Chinese Uighurs were jailed for six years for terrorism-related offences in July 2015; the Turkish Uighur is awaiting trial.<sup>21</sup> This case illustrates that Malaysia has at times been used as a transit point for militants, particularly from China and Indonesia, but police appear to have blocked off this traffic since late last year.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid; and interviews with BNPT officials.

<sup>19</sup> Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 'The Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia', IPAC Report no. 13, 24 September 2014. For examples of the jihadist debates on *takfir mu'ayyan*, see the websites MillahIbrahim (<https://millahibrahim.wordpress.com/2009/12/08/syarat-syarat-takfir-muayyan/>) and ar-Rahmah (<http://www.arrassmah.com/read/2012/05/30/20554-serial-kajian-tentang-takfir-muayyan-2-mengenal-kaedah-umum-takfir-muayyan.html>).

<sup>20</sup> 'Wapres Perintahkan Polisi dan TNI Selesaikan ISIS di Poso', *Kompas Online*, 29 December 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 'Indonesia's Lamongan Network: How East Java, Poso and Syria are Linked' IPAC Report no. 18, 15 April 2015; unpublished IPAC report 'More on the Uighurs Arrested in Near Poso', 16 November 2014; and Achmad Ibrahim, '3 Uighurs get 6 years over terrorism in Indonesia', *The Jakarta Post*, 13 July 2015.

<sup>22</sup> In January, Home Minister Zahid claimed that over 300 Chinese had transited to the war zone through Malaysia. ['Over 300 Chinese who joined IS transited through Malaysia', *Borneo Bulletin*, 22 January, 2015.] In the same month an ISIS website warned that it was no longer safe for Indonesians to transit through Malaysia. ['Malaysia cuts off route used by militants to join IS in Syria', *The Star*, 13 January, 2015.]

### III. SUPPORT FOR ISIS AND OTHER JIHADIST GROUPS

#### Background and Origins of Recruits

The characteristics of recruits to the pro- and anti-ISIS groups vary considerably. There is no single profile for the “average” ISIS recruit because in reality they come from diverse backgrounds: from the poor and poorly educated to well-to-do professionals; from teenagers to men in their 50s; from those from Islamic schools who have deep knowledge of their faith to those educated in secular schools whose Islamic learning is superficial; and from those who are jihadist “greenhorns” with no record of violence to those with several decades of involvement in terrorist groups and activities, including veterans of Afghanistan.

One important generalization can be made, though, about ISIS recruits. For all the sophistication and ubiquity of pro-ISIS websites, it is personal contacts and networks within established jihadist communities which are the most important route for those becoming seriously involved in ISIS support activities in Indonesia and who seek to go to Syria and Iraq. Most of the recruits who have travelled to the Islamic State have links to jihadist groups and individuals, sometimes because they themselves have had direct contact or because they knew someone who could put them in touch with such groups. It is through these interactions that the aspiring ISIS fighter can gain information about the caliphate and undergo preparation for the selection and training processes.

Recruits to non-ISIS groups in Syria and Iraq are of a different quality. They tend to be older, better educated and from religiously pious backgrounds. Those going to the Middle East via JI have mainly come from Islamic schools and are deeply socialized into Islamist circles. In Malaysia, similar distinction can be drawn between the current generation of jihadists drawn to ISIS and previous generations who involved themselves in Darul Islam, JI and KMM. The earlier jihadists came from two distinct backgrounds: either from religious schools or technical institutions. Many of the central figures in these organizations were veterans of the Afghanistan war in the 1980s and 1990s. But religious school graduates are very much a minority among the current ISIS recruits, with less than 10 percent of detainees having such a background, according to a senior Malaysian religious official.<sup>23</sup> The White Paper identifies six former ISA detainees amongst fighters in Syria, five from KMM and one from JI – a surprising ratio since KMM was a much smaller organization than JI. They have presumably played a major role as fighters, since they comprise at least two of 11 killed in Syria, two others injured in Syria, and provided the leadership of the April 5 group.<sup>24</sup>

As with Indonesia, Malaysian recruits come from diverse occupations and backgrounds. They have included a senior lecturer in Islamic studies at Malaysia’s premier university (the University of Malaya), other professionals, businesspersons, small traders, and homemakers. Remarkably, civil servants and the military have also been supporters. By December 2014, six bureaucrats had been identified as having joined or assisted ISIS. At least three members of the armed forces were arrested in 2014, and in April 2015 Deputy Defense Minister Datuk Abdul Rahim Bakri told the Senate that 70 members of the military had been found to be involved with the Islamic State group.

Not all those heading to Syria and Iraq go to fight. Some go to provide humanitarian assistance, and over the past year, increasing numbers of families have moved to the war zone, usually accompanying fighters. Probably as many as several dozen Indonesian families have settled in the Islamic State. Most of the families of fighters who have been killed in action have decided to stay, indicating not only that the wives shared their

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<sup>23</sup> ‘In Friday sermon, Jakim calls for “jihad” against liberals, IS’, *The Malay Mail Online*, 20 March 2015. Similar views were expressed by the president of the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (Abim). ‘Many Muslim youths keen on jihad with Isis, says Abim’, *The Malaysian Insider*, 17 September 2014.

<sup>24</sup> In August police reported that former KMM member Mat Soh had been killed in Syria, while two other KMM members, Mohd Rafi Udin and Zainuri Kamarudin had been injured. ‘Malaysian killed in Syria member of militant group, say police’, *The Malaysian Insider*, 21 August 2014. Former KMM leader Mohd Lotfi Arrifin died the following month.

husband's ideological commitment but also that leaving ISIS was both difficult and hazardous.<sup>25</sup> As many as ten Malaysian families, totaling 28 people, have gone to Syria since the end of 2014.<sup>26</sup> Women also have played an unusually active role, particularly through their understanding of social media. Several reports have claimed "lonely widows" were a particular target, and some even claim Malaysian women have gone to the conflict to provide "sexual jihad" (*jihad al-nikah*) for the fighters. Some reports say as many as 60 women have moved to Syria and Iraq but this is impossible to confirm.

Support for ISIS has been geographically dispersed across both Indonesia and Malaysia. In the former, many of the recruits have come from Java, Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), North Sumatra and Lampung. Java, South and Central Sulawesi and Medan in Sumatra have long been sites of jihadist activity, and Bima in NTT has in recent years experienced an upsurge in radicalism. In Malaysia, recruitment has been particularly concentrated in the peninsula, and especially Selangor and Kedah. Selangor probably has the largest concentration of Malays using social media in the country and was previously an important center for JI and KMM activities. Kedah is more difficult to understand, but may have a larger concentration of radical Islamic groups or individuals than elsewhere. It gained international publicity in January 2015 when the *New York Times* published a video report on militant Mohd Lofti Ariffin's death in war-torn Syria and attempts to inspire the former religious teacher's students to follow his path.<sup>27</sup> A small number of militant supporters have been detained in Sabah and Sarawak but none in relation to Syria or Iraq.

## Pro-ISIS Versus Pro-al-Qaeda Groups

ISIS has polarized jihadists in Southeast Asia. This has particularly been the case in Indonesia, where the Islamic State has opened up fissures in the jihadist community like no other group has. This process began with ISIS's split from *Jabhat al-Nusra*, the largest *al-Qaeda* affiliate in early 2013 and deepened dramatically with al-Baghdadi's proclamation of a *Daulah Islamiyah* (Islamic State) and himself as caliph on June 29, 2014. Initially many jihadists in Indonesia were sympathetic or at least neutral to ISIS, particularly when in May and June 2014 it won major victories in Fallujah, Ramadi and Mosul against US-backed Iraqi and Kurdish forces. But al-Baghdadi's declaration of an Islamic state and his own elevation to caliph proved highly divisive. While for some jihadists, the caliphate was a long-awaited restoration of a transnational Islamic government and focus, for its detractors, it was an illegitimate state that was brutally attacking its fellow Sunni Muslims. The exchanges between both sides were often vitriolic and personal, with many well-established relationships rent over conflicting attitudes towards ISIS.

## Pro-ISIS Indonesian Groups

The division between pro- and anti-ISIS is complex. On the pro-ISIS side the major support groups are:

1. ***Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid*** (Community of the Helpers of Monotheism; JAT). Founded in 2008 by former *Jemaah Islamiyah* emir, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, JAT at its peak in 2010 had many thousands of members and chapters across the archipelago. The organisation split over Ba'asyir's support for ISIS in mid-July, with some 80 percent of JAT members leaving to join the newly established *Jamaah Anshorut Syaria* (Congregation of Islamic Law Helpers; JAS). Although now small in size, JAT still facilitates recruitment to ISIS for its members and sympathisers.
2. ***Mujahidin Indonesia Timur*** (East Indonesian Jihad Fighters; MIT). Formed by a former JAT commander, Santoso (alias Abu Wardah al-Syarqi) in 2011, MIT comprises an array of jihadist cells in Central Sulawesi, West Nusa Tenggara (especially Bima) and East Kalimantan. Santoso was the first Indonesian jihadist leader to declare allegiance to ISIS, in late 2013, and MIT has strong links into Syria

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<sup>25</sup> IPAC, 'Lamongan Network'.

<sup>26</sup> 'Families leaving for Isis as Malaysia not Islamic enough, says top anti-terrorism cop', *The Malaysian Insider*, 23 May 2015.

<sup>27</sup> 'The Jihadist in Our Family', *New York Times*, 18 January 2015.

and features often in the international jihadist media. Despite being the most wanted terrorist in Indonesia, Santoso has proven to be an ineffective jihadist commander and his group in Central Sulawesi is now thought to number just 30 men and to control a small tract of land at Biru Mountain near the city of Poso. Although small in size and with little capacity, Santoso's MIT has considerable symbolic power because it is seen as controlling territory and thus having a "safe base" (*qaidah aminah*) in which Islam can be fully implemented.

3. ***Jamaah Tauhid wal Jihad*** (Community of Monotheism and Jihad; JTJ). Founded by Aman Abdurrahman (alias Oman Rochman) in 2004, JTJ has a loose structure and most of its activities are based in cells, numerous of which have become involved in terrorist operations.
4. ***Ring Banten***. This group split from *Darul Islam*, Indonesia's oldest jihadist organisation, in 1999 and its members were involved in both the 2002 Bali bombing and the 2004 Australian embassy bombing. One of its leaders, Rois (Iwan Dharmawan), is now on death row for his role in the latter attack. Several of its members have joined ISIS in Syria.
5. ***Gema Salam*** (contraction of Gerakan Mahasiswa Untuk Syariat Islam; Students' Movement for Islamic Law). Since 2013, Gema Salam has become a strong advocate of the ISIS cause on campuses in many parts of Indonesia. It follows the teachings of Aman Abdurrahman and runs the Shoutussalam.org website, one of the most prominent pro-ISIS sites in Indonesia. It also translates and publishes online the Indonesian version of ISIS's *Dabiq* journal.<sup>28</sup>
6. ***Mujahidin Indonesia Barat*** (Western Indonesia Holy War Fighters; MIB). Established in West Java in 2012 as a splinter group from a *Darul Islam* faction led by Abu Umar, it has a number of members who have joined ISIS in Syria.
7. ***FAKSI*** (Forum Aktivis Syariat Islam; Islamic Sharia Activists' Forum). Created by Muhammad Fachry (real name Tuah Febriwansyah) and Bahrum Syam in early 2013, FAKSI was based on the militant *al-Muhajirun* group in Indonesia and quickly became a leading source of pro-ISIS media activity in Indonesia. Its main site is al-Mustaqbal.com, which promotes the most extreme forms of ISIS ideology and is a major platform for spreading the teachings of Aman Abdurrahman. FAKSI organised a series of public lectures to advocate for ISIS, including mass pledges of support. Bahrum joined ISIS forces in Syria in May 2014 and quickly rose to prominence on social media and then as head of the Katibah, while Fachry busied himself with selecting and training ISIS recruits in Indonesia. There are unconfirmed reports that Bahrum was recently killed in Syria.<sup>29</sup>

## Anti-ISIS Indonesian Groups

The number of groups opposing ISIS is smaller but the constituencies that they represent are much larger. The main such groups are:

1. ***Jemaah Islamiyah*** (Islamic Community; JI). JI has been the largest and best-organized jihadist movement in Southeast Asia over the past twenty years. It was founded in Malaysia in January 1993 by two exiled Indonesian Islamic leaders, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, both of whom had defected from *Darul Islam* late in 1992. Although it had numerous Malaysian and Singaporean members, its primary basis was always in Indonesia. At its height in the early 2000s, it had more than 2000 members and a branch structure that spanned Indonesia, as well as Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Australia. In the late 1990s, the more militant sections of JI, inspired by bin Laden's example, began

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<sup>28</sup> Jones, 'Changing Patterns of Support for Violent Extremism in Indonesia'.

<sup>29</sup> Navhat Nuraniyah, 'How ISIS Charmed the New Generation of Indonesian Militants', *Middle East Institute*, 9 January 2015; and IPAC, 'The Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia'.

undertaking a range of terrorist attacks, culminating in the October 2002 Bali bombing which claimed 202 lives. The massive police crackdown after that bombing decimated JI, destroying much of its organisational structure and leaving it with an estimated 200 members circa 2007. Since that time, it has been quietly consolidating under the leadership of Para Widjajanto and Abu Rusdan. The outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2012 proved fortuitous for JI, which had been much criticised by jihadists for withdrawing from active operations. JI's leadership declared that it was permissible for its members to go to Syria to wage jihad and from 2013, the organisation's humanitarian wing, HASI, sent relief missions to the region. With the split of ISIS from *al-Nusra* and its rejection of *al-Qaeda*, JI became a strong critic of ISIS and increased its efforts to support the pro-*al-Qaeda* forces. JI-associated media such as its magazine *al-Najah*, the publishing house *Jazeera*, and websites *Syamina.org* and *Kiblat.net* are leading sources of criticism of ISIS and praise for *al-Nusra* and *al-Qaeda*.<sup>30</sup>

2. ***Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*** (Council of Indonesian Holy War Fighters; MMI). Founded by Ba'asyir in 2000 as an aboveground alternative to JI, MMI has primarily focused on championing sharia-ization in Indonesia, though its paramilitary wing was an important player in the Muslim-Christian violence that broke out in eastern Indonesia in the early 2000s. After Ba'asyir formed JAT in 2008, MMI lost many members to that organisation but has since stabilised under the leadership of Afghan veteran and prominent hard-line preacher, Abu Jibriel. MMI has been staunchly opposed to al-Baghdadi and ISIS and Jibriel's popular ar-Rahmah website has been a leading source of anti-ISIS news and commentary, and the Jibriel and Fachry circles have often engaged in vitriolic exchanges, including labelling the other "infidels" (*kafir*). MMI has its own channels to the *al-Nusra* Front and Jibriel's son, Muhammad Ridwan Abdurrahman, was killed fighting with al-Nusra forces in Syria in March of this year.
3. ***Jamaah Anshorul Syariat*** (Community of the Sharia Helpers; JAS). JAS was created in 2014 following Ba'asyir's pledge of loyalty to ISIS. The majority of the then JAT leadership objected not only to Ba'asyir's decision but also to his failure to consult with them before taking such a step. Muhammad Achwan, the acting JAT head during Ba'asyir's incarceration, along with two of Ba'asyir's sons, Abdul Rahim and Abdul Roshid, led a mass resignation from JAT and the setting up of JAS. The vast majority of JAT's members crossed to JAS, meaning that the latter has now eclipsed JAT as a centre of hardline Islamist activity. A central plank of JAS's platform is its rejection of al-Baghdadi's Islamic state.

The immediate threat posed by these anti-ISIS groups is much less than the pro-ISIS groups and, indeed, they play a crucial role in delegitimizing the Islamic State message and appeal. Were it not for their publicizing of ISIS's brutality towards Muslims and their attacks on the theological and jurisprudential basis of the Islamic State, it is likely that ISIS's recruitment in Indonesia would be far greater than it is. For many radicalized young Muslims, reading criticisms of ISIS on a jihadist website has far greater impact than receiving this information from government sources, moderate Muslim leaders or mainstream media, none of which are trusted by most jihadists.

These anti-ISIS groups, however, are far from benign. They remain committed to the principle of jihad and regard the use of violence as justifiable under particular conditions. The main difference is that they reject ISIS's version of valid jihad, including the wholesale apostatizing of other Muslims and the persecution and slaughter of non-combatant local non-Muslim populations. They also repudiate the Islamic State for being improperly constituted according to Islamic law. Nonetheless, they uphold the ideal of an Islamic state with comprehensive sharia implementation and believe that military training and use of force are permissible. Their argument is that violent jihad is not justified in the present conditions in Indonesia, but they do not rule out the possibility that this may change in the future.

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<sup>30</sup> Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 'Indonesians and the Syrian Conflict', IPAC Report no. 6, 30 January 2014.

## Pro-ISIS Malaysian Groups

The early involvement of Malaysians in the Syria and Iraq conflict did not have an ISIS focus. Yazid Sufaat, a former JI member who had been detained previously under Malaysia's Internal Security Act for his role in terrorist plots, was rearrested in 2013, and charged with supporting Al-Qaeda in Syria. The White Paper noted that most Malaysians involved in the conflict in late 2014 were supporters of *Ajnad al-Sham*, not ISIS. Some of the fighters interviewed around that time stressed that they were "independent" and did not support ISIS. The real situation since then is impossible to know as reporting has generally implied that any involvement in the conflict was on behalf of ISIS. It is clear, however, that Malaysian support for ISIS appears less organizationally based and more dependent on networks. Moreover, unlike in Indonesia, JI is no longer active in Malaysia. The once tightly-organized JI regional command (*mantiqi*) based in Malaysia and Singapore ceased to exist more than a decade ago, due not only to the deaths and arrests of most of its leadership but also a sustained crackdown by security agencies on any JI-related activity.

## IV. MOTIVATIONS AND DRIVERS OF SUPPORT

For Indonesians, the attraction of joining ISIS is different from previous episodes of transnational jihadism. For Indonesians involved in jihad in Afghanistan in the mid-1980s and in Mindanao in the mid-1990s there were both push and pull factors. During the high point of Soeharto's New Order regime, suppression and persecution of hardline Islamists was commonplace and systematic. Public discussion or promotion of an Islamic state or greater sharia law implementation was taboo, and the regime was seen as secularist and favoring Indonesia's Christian minority. Many activists were arrested and jailed for long periods, often suffering physical abuse, and, upon release, continuing discrimination and economic marginalization. In the most extreme cases, such as the Tanjung Priok riots of 1984, more than a hundred Muslim protestors were shot dead by the security forces. This helped to create a powerful sense that the Indonesian state was hostile to devout Muslims and determined to deny Islam a major role in political and social affairs. Many of the jihadists who went to Afghanistan and Mindanao did so bearing a deep antipathy to the regime and a commitment to gain skills abroad, which could be used upon their return to Indonesia to help overthrow Soeharto and create an Islamic state where Muslims could live freely and piously.

After the fall of the New Order regime in 1998, conditions changed dramatically. Muslims were able to form political parties and compete in elections, as well as form organizations without hindrance from the state. They were free to campaign for greater *sharia* law and an Islamic state, and in more than 50 of Indonesia's 515 districts, they succeeded in have *sharia*-derived bylaws passed. Islamists were also able to form vigilante groups that sought to restrict the activities of non-Muslim and Muslim communities that gave offence, including intimidating and sometimes attacking Muslim groups regarded as "deviant." More broadly, the nation has been undergoing rapid pietization within its Muslim community, resulting in Islam being far more prominent in public life now than at any time in the past. Thus, Indonesia is now a fairly congenial political and social setting for Muslims and, while Islamist may hope for a more formal enactment of Islamic law and norms, there is little sense that they are being driven from their homeland.

In contrast to Indonesia a push factor does seem important in Malaysia. Increasing state support for conservative Islam may well be contributing to an environment that breeds active and passive support for ISIS goals. In September 2001, Prime Minister Mahathir declared Malaysia an Islamic state, and his successors have continued to use this label. In reality it has not yet reached this level, but has moved ever closer as the ruling United Malays National Organization (UMNO) has increasingly made concessions to conservative Islam to buttress its declining political support. Despite promoting himself internationally as an Islamic moderate, at home Prime Minister Najib has aligned himself with conservative Islamic bureaucrats and NGOs in opposing liberalism and pluralism, while encouraging the Islamist PAS to believe he would support attempts to introduce extreme *hudud* law. Islam, he has argued, is under dire threat from its enemies, meaning Christians and Jews, and even liberal and Shia Muslims. Salafi views have gained increasing prominence, with

a new 'young ulama' group in UMNO and regular visits from Saudi Arabian and South Asian salafi preachers. This increasingly Islamist discourse in Malaysian politics undermines what remains of the country's secular tradition and shares many similarities with the uncompromising views of ISIS.

Little work has been done on the pull factors in Malaysia, but they are likely much the same as for Indonesia. The White Paper indeed supports this view with its reference to the importance of jihad, the apocalypse, and anger at the policies of Syrian leader Assad.

Therefore, it is "pull" factors rather than "push" factors that account for the movement of Indonesian and, quite possibly, Malaysian recruits towards ISIS. There are at least five key factors that can explain the drawing power of ISIS.

**Just War.** The first is the appeal of waging a "Just War." The central premise of this is that Sunni Muslims in Syria and Iraq are under mortal threat from the enemies of "true Islam," most notably the Assad-led Syrian government, which is seen as representing Shi'ism, and the forces of the Shia-dominated Iraqi state that is backed by both the United States-led coalition and Iran. Jihadists want to partake in jihad and Syria and Iraq are seen as the most important battlefields at present. Not all Indonesians joining ISIS for "Just War" reasons necessarily believe in all aspects of the Islamic State's doctrine but they do see it as constituting the most pressing conflict for Islam.

**Caliphate and Living in an Islamic System.** The second attraction is living within a caliphate. Most, but not all, ISIS recruits from Indonesia and Malaysia evince a high level of "*sharia*-mindedness" and fervently desire to live within a political system that is, to their minds, thoroughly Islamic. One indicator of this is that God's law is implemented comprehensively in the Islamic State and there is no civil (man-made) law, as in Indonesia or Malaysia. For them, *sharia* law is paramount and should be all encompassing. Any Muslim who is able to do so, should join an Islamic system and not remain in an idolatrous secular or religious neutral state.

**ISIS's Success and Legitimacy.** Third, ISIS has developed an aura of power and momentum that brings credibility. ISIS has been able to repeatedly defeat the Western-backed Iraqi, Kurdish and Syrian forces in a way that no jihadist movement has succeeded in doing since the *mujabidin* war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. This has enabled it to control territory and create a functioning state capable of resisting the military campaigns of the un-Islamic forces. The symbolic power of this is immense, and is interpreted by many ISIS supporters as a sign of divine blessing for the Islamic State struggle.

**Apocalyptic Prophecies and the Final Battle.** Fourth, Syria and Iraq have great eschatological significance as being the site of Islam's final cataclysmic battle with its foes leading to the Day of Judgment. According to the Qur'an, the recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, and many classical prophecies, Islam will confront its enemies in the region of *Sham* (Greater Syria) and ultimately win a resounding victory over the anti-Christ and his forces of unbelief. Many of the prophecies are interpreted to mean that true Muslims, led by the Mahdi (Muhammad's successor) will enter into battle with the Shia and other deviant sects in Islam, as well as Christians, Jews and other heathens.

These prophecies are seen as conforming to many of the elements present in the current Syria-Iraq conflict. The Assad regime is Shia, the Iraqi forces are seen as backed by Shia Iran and an alliance of Christian Western nations, Israel has supported anti-Assad forces that are also anti-ISIS, and Kurds are viewed as apostates. Thus, contemporary Syria and Iraq contain all the ingredients required for a final unfolding of the forces of history. In joining ISIS, recruits believe that they will be part of this glorious series of battles that results in Islam's triumph and their own eternal salvation. There is evidence that some recruits have gone to Syria with the aim of never returning to Indonesia, such is their belief in the rightness of the struggle there. They would rather die in Syria than return to Indonesia.

**Financial and Welfare Benefits.** Fifth, for some of the recruits the attractions of joining ISIS are more mundane and material. ISIS pays much higher salaries to soldiers than they can earn in Indonesia, it provides low-cost accommodation and it offers generous health and education packages for their families. Even if fighters are killed in battle, their families are, they believe, allowed to stay as permanent citizens of the Islamic State. This brings great cache, as they will be raised within an Islamic society comprising Muslims from around the world living in a manner ordained by the Prophet himself. If the fighters survive and do return to Indonesia, their standing will be elevated by their experiences as an ISIS soldier, much as those returning from Afghanistan were regarded as having enhanced authority having put their lives at risk defending Islam.<sup>31</sup>

## V. NETWORKS AND MECHANISMS OF RECRUITMENT AND SUPPORT

ISIS has no region-wide or country-based organization or leadership in Southeast Asia. The plethora of pro-ISIS groups named above have no formal coordination in their efforts to support the Islamic State. Informal networks and personal relationships are the key to understanding how ISIS supporters promote their cause and assist the caliphate. Pro-ISIS networks are much better understood in Indonesia than they are in Malaysia, thanks largely to the research undertaken by Sidney Jones' IPAC.

### Leaders and Networks

At the center of Indonesia's growing ISIS support community is one man: Aman Abdurrahman. Currently in the maximum-security wing of Nusakambangan jail due to his role in supporting the Aceh terrorist camp in 2010, Aman is one of the most prolific and militant intellectuals in Indonesian jihadism. For well over a decade, he has indefatigably translated jihadist texts from Arabic into Indonesian and advocated some of the most extreme positions regarding the conduct of jihad. He calls for continued jihadist action in Indonesia and has popularized the ISIS doctrine of *takefir mu'ayyan* that allows government officials to be deemed infidels and valid targets for attack. Even though prison regulations forbid him from having access to mobile phones and computers, he nonetheless continues to be able to do so, enabling him to both receive new jihadist tracts and smuggle out his translations and commentaries.

Aman initially declared support for ISIS in November 2013, one of the first senior Indonesian jihadists to do so, and later formally swore loyalty to al-Baghdadi as caliph on April 16, 2014. He, more than any other individual, has persuaded Indonesian jihadists to join the Islamic State's cause. He was crucial in convincing Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and 23 other inmates to pledge allegiance on July 2, 2014. Most of the other key pro-ISIS activists defer to him, including Bahrum Syah, who heads the *Katibab* military unit for Indonesian and Malaysian fighters. Aman also constantly urges his followers to go to Syria to fight with ISIS. Within the broader jihadist community, Aman is a divisive figure, with many fellow jihadists regarding his views as too extreme, as well as counterproductive for the Islamic struggle in Indonesia. There is particular criticism of his teachings on apostasy and willingness to condemn fellow Muslims who hold views different from his own.<sup>32</sup> He has declared anti-ISIS Muslim leaders in Indonesia to be infidels (*kafir*) and *Kharijites*, a reference to an early dissenting sect in Islam that most Sunnis regard as heretical.<sup>33</sup>

Another important person for the development of ISIS in Indonesia is M. Fachry. Over the past 18 months, he has become the main organizer of the movement's activities and also its most effective propagator of its messages through digital media. He is an acolyte of Aman who was radicalized in the early 2000s by the

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<sup>31</sup> IPAC, 'Indonesians and the Syrian Conflict'.

<sup>32</sup> Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 'Support for "Islamic State" in Indonesian Prisons', IPAC Report no. 15, 19 January 2015.

<sup>33</sup> IPAC, 'Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia'; and Jones, 'Changing Patterns of Support for Violent Extremism'.

British-based al-Muhajiroun organization led by Omar Bakri and Anjem Choudary. This was an aggressively *takfiri* movement that advocated extreme violence against Islam's perceived enemies. With the split between ISIS and al-Nusra in early 2013, Fachry sided with al-Baghdadi, shortly after setting up FAKSI to promote its struggle. Throughout the early part of 2014, he organized a series of mass loyalty pledges to ISIS, which gave the movement its early momentum.<sup>34</sup> Fachry was arrested in early 2015 and is awaiting trial on terrorism financing charges. As he has never been involved in violence, it has proved difficult for the police to charge him.

Santoso has the highest profile of any pro-ISIS jihadist in Indonesia but his importance is over-stated, in large part due to his own brazen self-promotion. Several years ago, he began referring to himself as "Indonesia's Zarqawi" and he was also the first prominent Indonesian to declare loyalty to al-Baghdadi in 2013. He has used social media, especially YouTube clips, to cast himself and MIT as a focus of ISIS activity. Santoso does have symbolic status as leader of the only jihadist group in Indonesia that controls territory – a valued jihadist achievement given the emphasis placed upon creating "safe bases" (*qaidah aminah*) for Muslims – and also has standing for his continued attempts to launch attacks on local 'infidel' targets. This has given him some cache within the central ISIS leadership. In reality, though, his role is limited. He is estimated to have only about 30 members in his group and the land under his command is a small, remote and strategically insignificant patch of jungle on the slopes of Mount Biru in Central Sulawesi. Moreover, most of MIT's terrorism operations have been amateurish failures.<sup>35</sup> Unlike Aman, Santoso is neither religiously erudite nor an eloquent advocate for ISIS. A small number of MIT members have gone to Syria and Iraq.

## Recruitment and Selection Processes

Indonesians seeking to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq have several options open to them. By far the most common is to gain the approval from one of numerous selection panels set up by ISIS activists across Indonesia. These panels are ad hoc in nature and usually rely upon a senior ISIS supporter for their formation and operation. Most of the panels are led by activists close to Aman Abdurrahman, who appears to provide loose guidance to them regarding selection criteria and processes. It appears there is no routine communication between panels and they are often based within a particular pro-ISIS group, such as JAT, MIT, MIB or FAKSI. Most panels appear to have their own networks of contacts within ISIS who can arrange for the passage of recruits to Syria. These contacts are usually, but not always, Indonesian or Malaysian fighters who have good standing within the Islamic State. A would-be ISIS fighter makes contact with a panel or pro-ISIS group and is then assessed. If they are deemed suitable, the panel issues a letter of recommendation (*tazkiyah*) that is conveyed to the Syria contact. Some panels provide ideological training, as well as assisting with the travel arrangements. Nearly all Syria-bound recruits enter via Turkey. The ISIS contact arranges for them to be met on the border.

There are other ways of getting to Syria, though in the past year they have become more hazardous. Tens of Indonesian students in the Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Yemen and Pakistan have abandoned their studies and joined ISIS, seemingly going through networks in the countries where they were based. Some also appear to have reached Syria almost solely through Internet contacts, but since 2014, this has carried a high risk of capture by Turkish authorities because of the close monitoring of foreigners who are waiting on the Syrian border for ISIS approval to enter.

For the *al-Nusra* Front, nearly all its recruits come via *Jemaah Islamiyah*, which has its own, quite rigorous selection process. JI usually sends only inducted members. Becoming a JI member is itself a protracted and testing process, requiring at least a year of involvement in religious study groups and community activities before a candidate is regarded as having proven their commitment, piety and trustworthiness. The majority of

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<sup>34</sup> IPAC, 'Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia'.

<sup>35</sup> Sidney Jones, 'Counter-terrorism and the Rise of ISIS in 2014', *Tempo*, 5 January 2015; and IPAC, 'Lamongan Network'.

JI sponsored travel to Syria is for humanitarian, religious and logistical purposes, and usually also for periods of less than a year.<sup>36</sup>

In Malaysia, networks for assisting fighters in Syria and Iraq were started by remnants of old militant groups. The former JI leader Yazid Sufaat, for example, commenced activities around 2012 in the traditional way – recruiting supporters through study sessions (*usrah*) at his house once a week and eventually establishing four cells to support pro-*al-Qaeda* forces in Syria. Another contact with prior involvement in jihadist networks, academic Dr. Mahmud, played a key part in establishing a web of supporters, tapping in to connections in the southern Philippines, to whence he eventually fled after Malaysian authorities discovered his activities. Others built new cells, based on personal connections and links established through social media. At least eight cells have been established primarily for organizing all-expenses paid travel to Syria and Iraq and for providing additional support to those in the field. Some military-style training was also held in peninsular Malaysia in 2013 at camps near Malacca and Kuala Kangsar.

## Social Media

Social media has become a vital means of disseminating and popularizing ISIS messages and to radicalizing young Muslims so that they become interested in joining the Islamic State, but there are few cases where recruitment has been largely or solely through electronic media. More commonly, those who become attracted to pro-ISIS websites are then drawn into attending seminars, religious study classes and public lectures given by jihadist preachers and ideologues, which in turn leads to their admission into groups and networks that can facilitate their acceptance into ISIS's forces. There is little evidence of Internet self-radicalization taking place and Indonesia has had only one case, in 2010, of a lone-wolf attacker, the so-called "Bicycle Bomber" Ahmad Abdul Rabani, who was not at that stage an acolyte of any jihadist group.<sup>37</sup>

Pro-ISIS activists make extensive use of the Internet and run a number of prominent jihadist websites. The leading ones are al-Mustaqbal (<https://al.mustaqbal.com>), which was founded by M. Fachry, Millah Ibrahim (<https://millahibrahim.wordpress.com>) which carries Indonesian-language versions of ISIS's *Dabiq* magazine and often features columns from Aman Abdurrahman, Shoutussalam (<http://shoutussalam.org>) which is managed by Gema Salam, Forum Islam al-Busyiro ([https://twitter.com/forum\\_al\\_busyiro](https://twitter.com/forum_al_busyiro)), a militant jihadist chat forum that republishes *inter alia* martyrdom notices for ISIS fallen and MIT bulletins, and Muslim Daily (<https://muslimdaily.net>) run by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir supporters that is strongly anti-Shia and approving of ISIS military action against Assad's Syrian forces. All of these websites are well produced, with attractive graphics, frequent updates, and extensive archives on a wide range of topics. In addition to this, ISIS has used to great effect YouTube video's such as "Joining the Ranks," released in July 2014, that featured Bahrum Syah appealing to his fellow Indonesians to become fighters in Syria and Iraq (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxsPR-fYnk>).

Pitted against these ISIS sites are a range of pro-*Jabhat al-Nusra* and *al-Qaeda* sites. The most popular of these are ar-Rahmah (<http://www.arahmah.com>) and Voice of al-Islam (<http://www.voa-islam.com>), both of which are sharply critical of the Islamic State. Other influential sites include the JI-associated sites Syamina (<http://syamina.org>), an-Najah (<http://www.an-najah.net>) and Kiblat (<http://www.kiblat.net>).

In Malaysia, however, social media has been the driving force behind militant recruitment. Malaysia has high exposure to the Internet and ISIS has mounted a steady and sophisticated campaign through this means. According to Home Affairs Minister Zahid, social media is responsible for about 75 percent of ISIS recruitment.<sup>38</sup> Facebook also reportedly played a part in creating jihadist cells in support of the Islamic State.

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<sup>36</sup> Interviews with former JI members and Densus officer in Jakarta, June 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Rabani was sentenced to five years jail in 2011 and, since 2014, has become a fanatical ISIS supporter. He is due for release in 2016.

<sup>38</sup> 'Indonesian Bicycle Bomber gets 5.5 years jail', *Associated Press*, 24 May 2011.

<sup>38</sup> '75% of Malaysian Isis militants recruited through social media, says Zahid', *The Malaysian Insider*, 25 May 2015.

## Prisons

In Indonesia, prisons are another major site of ISIS recruitment. Due to overcrowding and limited resources, Indonesian prison officials struggle to isolate jihadist inmates from the general jail population and frequently terrorists are respected by Muslim prisoners for their knowledge of Islam and preaching skills.<sup>39</sup> Numerous inmates from outside jihadist groups have been ‘converted’ to Islamic militancy in jail after coming under the influence of terrorist detainees and several are known to have travelled to Syria to fight with ISIS.<sup>40</sup>

Attempts by the Director-General for Corrections to crack down on ISIS-related activities in jails have been only partly successful. The linking of remissions to formal admission of remorse, participation in de-radicalization courses and pledging of loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia and its national doctrine of *Pancasila*, has persuaded some of the less militant jihadist inmates be more cooperative. However, for the committed ISIS prisoners, the measures have aroused resentment and worsened relations between them and jail staff. Aman Abdurrahman is one of the leading inmates urging non-cooperation. In Malaysia, the traditional role of prisons in spreading the militant message has been blocked by separation of pro-ISIS inmates from all others.<sup>41</sup>

## Mosques and Islamic School Networks

Of the more than 30,000 *pesantren* in Indonesia, the percentage with any record of producing terrorists is minute, and over the past decade, almost as many recruits to extremist groups have come from “secular” state schools as have come from Islamic educational institutions.

However, it is also the case that networks of people associated with a relatively small number of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and mosques remain an important mechanism for jihadist recruitment in Indonesia. Leading *pesantren* for producing fighters for Syria and Iraq include Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s al-Mukmin school at Ngruki, al-Muslimin in Magetan, Darus Syahadah in Boyolali – all of which are in Central Java – and al-Islam and al-Ikhlas in Lamongan, East Java. It should be noted that these *pesantren* have graduates who are drawn to both ISIS and its rivals. Al-Mukmin is a good case in point. Although titular leadership is in the hands of the jailed Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, who staunchly supports ISIS, his son Abdurrahim, who is vehemently opposed to ISIS and played a leading role in the formation of JAS, directs the school. Al-Mukmin has former students in both JI and ISIS. The al-Islam *pesantren* in Lamongan, which is controlled by the brothers of three of JI’s Bali bombers – Muchlas, Amrozi and Ali Imron – is a similar case, with graduates being recruited to ISIS and JI.

A relatively small number of mosques have also become sites of pro-ISIS mobilization. Some of these mosques have been taken over by ISIS sympathizers and most of the activities that take place within are of a radical nature. Other mosques that are sometimes used for ISIS events have lax management and the mosque officials are often not fully aware of the content of sermons and discussions. Mosques in Indonesia have a high degree of autonomy from the state and the Ministry of Religious Affairs provides little regular monitoring of mosque activities. Densus does maintain surveillance of mosques and Islamic discussion groups that are known to be places of ISIS propagation.

As noted earlier, Malaysian religious schools have not been a major recruitment source for ISIS. Mosques are tightly controlled by the government. Even Friday sermons are written by state authorities.

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<sup>39</sup> Interviews with senior Indonesian Corrections Directorate-General officials, Sydney, October 2014.

<sup>40</sup> IPAC, ‘Support for “Islamic State” in Indonesian Prisons’.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Malaysian ISIS inmates isolated after preaching to prisoners’, *AFP*, 23 January, 2015.

## VI. GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETAL RESPONSES

The emergence of ISIS has drawn emphatic responses from the Indonesian and Malaysian governments and Muslim communities. In both countries, state action against militant Muslims, particularly those who claim to be defending their faith and its adherents in other parts of the Islamic world, is a sensitive political matter and successive Indonesian and Malaysian governments have proceeded with some caution in order to avoid charges of anti-Islamic behavior. Both governments were initially slow to react but, over the past year, have been galvanized into action. Their change of heart has been predominantly driven by domestic factors but growing international attention to ISIS-related activities in Southeast Asia has played some part in this.

ISIS has aroused an unprecedented response from the Indonesian government as well as from the mainstream Islamic community, especially if compared to the reaction to preceding terrorist threats from groups such as *Jemaah Islamiyah* and the Noordin Network. JI has never been banned in Indonesia, despite it being responsible for bombings, which claimed more than 200 lives in the early 2000s, and the Megawati government's co-sponsoring of the motion in the United Nations in late 2002 to have the organization listed as a terrorist group. While successive governments were happy to support the counter-terrorism efforts of the police, they were hesitant to speak out strongly against specific terrorist groups for fear of antagonizing the Islamic community. For example, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono repeatedly justified his government's failure to ban JI by falsely claiming that it was a Singapore and Malaysia-based organization, not Indonesian. Similarly, there was widespread skepticism within the Muslim community as to whether JI even existed, with many believing it to be a conspiracy by foreign governments. Hasyim Muzadi, the chairman of Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) declared repeatedly that JI was a "creation of the CIA". NU and other major Islamic groupings such as Muhammadiyah and Persis were reluctant to become involved in anything but the most generic of counter-terrorism campaigns.

The reaction to ISIS, by contrast, has been pronounced, from both government and the Islamic community. Yudhoyono proscribed ISIS on August 4, 2014 and both his and the successor government of President Joko Widodo have disbursed millions of dollars of funding for counter-terrorism efforts in the media and community specifically targeting ISIS. Numerous ministers and senior security officials have issued regular statements condemning ISIS and warning of the grave risk that it poses to Indonesia. Large Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah have also launched anti-radicalization activities in their communities and their leaders have denounced ISIS actions and teachings. Even grassroots communities have mobilized against the Islamic State, with many hundreds, if not thousands of villages across the nation erecting banners declaring that they reject ISIS.

Malaysia was slow to recognize a threat posed by ISIS, and to implement policies – other than police actions – to address this. On June 24, 2014, Najib expressed admiration for ISIS, and called on UMNO to emulate the bravery of a group that had defeated an Iraqi force outnumbering it nearly 30 to one. State religious authorities were also slow to condemn the atrocities committed by ISIS, giving greater attention to issues such as strengthening sharia law and moral policing. But two days after Najib's speech his office issued a statement saying his remarks had been taken out of context and did not, in any way imply support for ISIS; and that indeed Malaysia recognized ISIS as a terrorist organization and would do all it could to oppose it. He subsequently made numerous speeches in which he denounced ISIS as a terrorist organization that was a global threat and could not be considered Muslim.

### Framing the ISIS Issue: Terrorists or Traitors?

Before examining in detail the Indonesian government's counter-terrorism measures, it is worth considering more closely the reasons for this emphatic state and societal reaction. The government responded not so much to ISIS's ideology or its barbaric actions against both Muslim and non-Muslim "enemies," but rather to the Islamic State's attempted subversion of Indonesian nationalism. ISIS had been active since early 2013 and had been drawing Indonesian recruits to fight with it from the middle of that year. Its big military victories in

early to mid-2014, accompanied by the persecution and killing of rival Sunni fighters and religious and ethnic minorities such as the Shias, Christians and Yezidis drew only a muted response from Indonesian leaders. Even the release of ISIS videos in late 2013 and the first half of 2014 in which Indonesian jihadists threatened to return to their homeland to kill police and government officials or called on Indonesian Muslims to renounce the Republic and join ISIS were deplored by the government but did not result in firm action. It was not until July 2014, when a series of mass pledges of allegiance to ISIS gained wide media coverage that the government and Muslim organizations were galvanized to act. Not only did Yudhoyono “ban” ISIS but also Muslim bodies such as the National Ulama Council, NU and Muhammadiyah began issuing religious rulings against the Islamic State and warning Muslims from participating in it. While many officials and Islamic leaders often disputed the religious legitimacy of ISIS, by far the more commonly expressed objection to it was that it was encouraging Indonesian Muslims to repudiate their own nation and thus was a seditious organization. Judging by the public discourse, the primary objection to ISIS is that it enjoins treason rather than that it engages in terror.

One of the major problems for both government and community responses to ISIS is that very few people understand the organization’s ideology or the motivations of those who seek to join it. Sources of well-informed, reliable analysis on ISIS are scarce, both within government agencies and in the public domain. Densus has excellent databases and a detailed knowledge of terrorist group operations but its advice is not always sought or heeded in upper levels of the Joko Widodo government. Indonesia’s main intelligence agency, BIN (Badan Intelijens Nasional; National Intelligence Agency) has a poor record on terrorism analysis, as also does its military counter-part. BNPT (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme; National Anti-Terrorism Agency), the premier coordinating body for counter-terrorism lacks analytical capacity and few of its senior officers are expert on the subject. Only a handful of academics and NGO researchers have a sophisticated understanding either. One of the few organizations with an excellent track record of publicly available commentary is Sidney Jones’ Jakarta-based IPAC. The only media outlet that has consistently reported well on terrorism has been the *Tempo* group.

Malaysian leaders have defined the primary threat from ISIS as being about national security, particularly the prospect of militants returning from their activities in Syria and Iraq radicalized and trained in violence. The Afghan model has been uppermost in their minds. When fighters in Afghanistan returned to Malaysia in the 1980s and 1990s, they established the KMM and JI. While JI made virtually no attempt to pursue militant activities in Malaysia, and the extent of KMM’s militant activities is contested, the example of JI in Indonesia was cause for Malaysian security officials to be concerned. And, the court case against Murad provides evidence that a real threat exists. Nonetheless, the seriousness of this threat may have been exaggerated, just as a similar threat was in the past.<sup>42</sup>

A particular threat was also said to exist in relation to Sabah, where 235 Filipino militants staged an invasion from February to March 2013, though no evidence of ISIS involvement in this conflict has been forthcoming. Authorities also claimed the creation of a joint Indonesian-Malaysian military unit demonstrated ISIS represented a threat to Southeast Asia as a whole.

More broadly, ISIS was bringing Islam into disrepute and dividing the community, playing into the hands of the Jews and the West. Rais Yatim, UMNO veteran and government adviser on socio-cultural affairs, claimed that even the name Islamic State was a Jewish and Western plot, and brought all Islamic states, including Malaysia, into disrepute.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The Malaysian police Special Branch is the main agency dealing with militancy. It is marked by, in Zachary Abuza’s words, ‘incredible politicization’. (‘Joining the New Caravan: ISIS and the Regeneration of Terrorism in Southeast Asia’, 25 June, 2015. Available at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/joining-the-new-caravan/2015/06/25>.) An illustration of how it exaggerated the threat in the past was its decision to refer to the KMM as *Kumpulan Militant Malaysia* (Malaysian Militant Group), and use this for both the KMM and JI. Kamarulnizam Abdullah, ‘Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI): The Links’. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, vol. 4, issue 1, 2009, p.11, fn 29.

<sup>43</sup> “‘The Eye’ kawal IS?’, *Utusan Malaysia*, 17 March 2015.

## Government Responses

By far the most successful aspect of Indonesia's counter-terrorism effort has been the work of Densus. In a police force notorious for corruption and incompetence, Densus stands out as a one of the few units possessing high professionalism and an excellent track record of investigative success. Since 2002, it has arrested more than 1,000 suspected terrorists, successfully prosecuting more than 700 of them. Indeed, it has a near 100 percent conviction rate. Moreover, over the past six years, it has proven highly effective at detecting new terrorist plots and disrupting emerging terrorist cells. Such is its success that many experienced jihadists believe that it is too risky to engage in violent operations in Indonesia and prefer to either delay their plans or move abroad. Densus's biggest blemish in recent years has been its willingness to shoot dead terrorists rather than capture them alive. Since 2009, more than 60 terrorists have been killed by the police, sparking retributive campaigns by jihadists to kill police officers – some 25 have died in shooting and knifing attacks in the past 6 years. Despite this violence, Densus officers have been able to build personal relationships with a sizeable number of jihadists, especially those who have been convicted. They routinely provide support to families while the terrorist is incarcerated, and sometimes assist released jihadists by giving startup capital for business and helping them gain employment.

BNPT is the Indonesian institution charged with leading both preventive measures against terrorists and counter-terrorism law enforcement operations. It was created in 2010 to, among other things, coordinate police, military and intelligence agencies' counter-terrorism activities. BNPT, almost from the outset, has been a poorly performing agency that has had far less impact than its budget and resources suggest that it should. Some of its problems are structural and some relate to personnel and internal culture. One key issue has been the division of responsibilities between the police and TNI within BNPT. Prevention tasks are currently under the leadership of a senior army officer whereas operations are run by the police. Rivalry between the two services, whether within or without BNPT, is intense and cooperation between the prevention and operations personnel is grudging at best. Moreover, TNI officers lack a detailed knowledge of terrorism and are not well suited to running either public information campaigns or outreach into communities at risk of radicalization. The present head of prevention in BNPT, Brigadier Agus Surya Bakhti, is a good case in point. He regards the central cause of terrorism as being a lack of nationalism and thus favors programs based on promotion of national values.<sup>44</sup>

An indication of BNPT's incompetence on counter-terrorism issues was its attempt to shut down 19 jihadist websites in March 2015 because they were mobilizing support for the Islamic State. This decision seemed poorly thought through at every level. To begin with, both pro- and anti-ISIS websites were targeted including ar-Rahmah, Voice of al-Islam and Kiblat. BNPT's action drew immediate fire from not only Islamist groups but also media rights' groups and NGOs, some of which threatened to challenge the validity of the ban in the courts. Moreover, as numerous IT commentators pointed out, it was relatively easy for ISIS's supporters to defy the ban, either by bypassing the attempted blocking of the sites or by reopening the webpage at a new address. Several days later, BNPT was forced to lift the ban, blaming the Information and Communication Ministry for creating the problem.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the most serious failure of the Indonesian government's counter-terrorism efforts has been in prisons. Since 2003, there have been a number of poorly designed and badly implemented de-radicalization programs for jihadist inmates. These have often involved doctrinal education courses in which Islamic scholars seek to persuade jihadists of the error of their militant interpretations. Very few inmates have changed their views due to such courses and many were openly resentful at being lectured to by scholars who they felt had little credibility. What has been more effective has been support for jihadist families and provision of business training. Studies of releasees who have disengaged from terrorism have found that

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, the comments of Surya Bakhti that ISIS was 'rebellious' in 'BNPT: Baiat Setia Kepada ISIS Makar', *Koran Tempo*, 4 August 2014.

<sup>45</sup> 'BNPT Minta Situs Radikal Ditutup Karena Memuat SARA', *Okezone*, 4 April 2015; 'Govt Unblocks Radical Websites', *The Jakarta Post*, 5 April 2015.

family pressure was a major factor in convincing them to withdraw from violent activities. Setting them up with the necessary skills and capital to run a small business has also helped many to gainful employment. Lastly, effective management of jihadist prisoners by correctional staff can have a big impact, especially through selective integration of inmates with the general jail population.

Malaysia's primary response has been to intensify police actions, making pre-emptive arrests and strengthening already draconian laws even further, actions foreshadowed in the White Paper.<sup>46</sup> Government leaders have highlighted ISIS atrocities, showing a video clip of these at the November 2014 UMNO general assembly, with the implied message that this could happen in Malaysia if Malays did not continue to support UMNO. Religious leaders have been mobilized to support government views, issuing a *fatwa* against ISIS in October 2014 declaring it to be illegal and that fighters who died there were not martyrs. (*Fatwas* have the force of law in Malaysia, though approval is also required from state Islamic authorities.) Officially-approved sermons also denounced ISIS and the ISIS doctrine of jihad – maintaining that jihad covered diverse human endeavors and was not just about war. Malaysia has also engaged in a wide range of initiatives to support an international campaign against ISIS.<sup>47</sup>

The government has had some success in limiting militant activities. If its announcements are correct, it has had particular success in stopping militants departing for the battle zone, and preventing Malaysia from being used as a transit point for foreign militants.

But there are several shortcomings in the government's approach, the most important being government support for conservative Islamic interests in an attempt to arrest declining support for the ruling UMNO. As noted, Prime Minister Najib has been an admired advocate of moderate Islam on the international stage, but aligned himself with a conservative, salafi-influenced Islam at home. Such actions alienate an important Muslim constituency, which might otherwise be a natural partner against militants. Malaysia's Islamic bureaucracy has not been effective in opposing the ISIS message, in particular its doctrine of jihad. A recent sermon failed to explain the relationship between jihad as war and other types of jihad, and rejected ISIS jihad only because ISIS inflicted atrocities on Muslims and non-Muslims without distinction.<sup>48</sup>

And finally, the passage of more draconian legislation when existing laws are more than adequate, a lack of transparency over militant developments, the attempted use of militant atrocities to rally support behind UMNO,<sup>49</sup> exaggeration of the militant threat, and occasional instances of apparent complacency,<sup>50</sup> all detract from the credibility of the government's policies.

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<sup>46</sup> For an excellent analysis of Malaysian laws before 2015 changes see Amanda Whiting, 'Emerging from Emergency Rule? Malaysian Law "Reform" 2011-2013', *Australian Journal of Asian Law*, 2013, Vol 14, No 2. In April 2015 parliament passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), the Special Measures against Terrorism in Foreign Countries Act, and amended five related acts, particularly the Penal Code. Later that month the Sedition Act was also amended and strengthened. Five people had been sentenced under these new laws by mid September 2015. The Bar Council, among others, has been highly critical of these changes, describing them as oppressive and unjust. POTA, in particular, which reintroduces detention without charge, has been described as more likely to radicalise than combat terrorism. [See 'Instead of combating terrorism, Pota will radicalise more people', *The Malaysian Insider*, 17 May, 2015. See also the joint statement by The Malaysian Bar, the Sabah Law Association and the Advocates' Association of Sarawak, 'Detention Without Trial is Oppressive and Unjust, and Violates the Rule of Law', 10 April, 2015. Available at:

[http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/press\\_statements/joint\\_press\\_release\\_by\\_the\\_three\\_bars\\_of\\_malaysia\\_|\\_detention\\_without\\_trial\\_is\\_oppressive\\_and\\_unjust\\_and\\_violates\\_the\\_rule\\_of\\_law.html](http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/press_statements/joint_press_release_by_the_three_bars_of_malaysia_|_detention_without_trial_is_oppressive_and_unjust_and_violates_the_rule_of_law.html) ]

<sup>47</sup> Malaysia's international cooperation on terrorism is detailed in the US Department of State 2014 Country Terrorism Reports. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239405.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, "Tuntutan Jihad Semasa", 24 April, 2015. Available at: <http://www.islam.gov.my/khutbah-online?page=1&order=title&sort=desc>.

<sup>49</sup> Another example of using ISIS for rallying support behind UMNO was the claim by a senior UMNO leader that a controversial donation of RM2.6 billion in the personal bank account of Prime Minister Najib was to thank Malaysia for its strong stand against ISIS. ['Najib's RM2.6 billion is from Saudi Arabia as thanks for fighting Isis, claims Umno leader', *The Malaysian Insider*, 16 August 2015.] In fact the money was donated in March 2015, before ISIS had been established.

<sup>50</sup> In January, a shop in Selangor was reported to be selling a range of ISIS merchandise, including T-shirts, flags and caps. And authorities have sometimes reacted much more urgently against other opponents than Islamic militants. It has revoked the passports of critics of the judiciary and Malay rulers, but never of militants fighting overseas, while the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has closed internet sites critical of the government but never any ISIS-linked sites.

## Muslim and Civil Society Responses

BNPT spends millions of dollars on anti-radicalization campaigns, with much of the money channeled to organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah. Often such organizations have their own objectives for engaging in these campaigns and delegitimizing ISIS is often a secondary issue. For example, NU has been waging an anti-Wahhabism campaign for many years, which relates to long-standing doctrinal disagreements rather than security issues and terrorism. A further problem with these sorts of campaigns is that they have little traction within radical communities. For those inclined to jihadism, mainstream Muslim leaders, and organizations are part of Islam's problem and are not sources of authority. In the case of Muhammadiyah, counter-terrorism campaigns are more sensitive, not only because numerous members have joined ISIS and other extremist groups but also because the organization has a strongly conservative wing led by Islamic scholars and preachers who are very reluctant to condemn jihadism.

In Malaysia, outside of government circles, the Muslim Youth Movement or ABIM was one of the few non-government organizations to express concern about ISIS from an early stage, perhaps reflecting the views of its former leader and former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, who made several speeches condemning the Islamic State prior to his recent controversial jail sentence for sodomy. Only 21 percent saw it as a major global threat, compared to 65 percent in Indonesia.<sup>51</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Overall Assessment of the Current and Potential Threat

The impact of ISIS on Southeast Asian jihadism has been significant. Its extreme ideology, its battlefield victories, its control of territory and creation of a functioning state, have drawn many hundreds across the region, quite possibly thousands, to support it. ISIS has given new legitimacy to jihad as extreme violence, not only in theatres of war, but also in civilian settings directed against non-combatants – this after more than a decade during which most Indonesian and Malaysian jihadists had disengaged from such activities either because they regarded them as too risky or as wrong in principle. As a result, it has made Southeast Asia a more dangerous place.

Exactly how much more dangerous is a matter of conjecture among analysts and scholars. Some have deemed ISIS to already pose a dramatically increased threat to security in the region. We believe that the evidence does not yet support such a conclusion. While ISIS has the potential for great violence in Indonesia and Malaysia, this has to date not been realized. ISIS has not sent Indonesian and Malaysian fighters back to their homelands to wage jihad there and its leadership appears focused on maximizing military resources in Syria and Iraq rather than exporting violence to other locations. We acknowledge that ISIS propaganda upholds the principle of its supporters carrying out attacks anywhere in the world, but, notwithstanding the September 2015 mentioning of Indonesia and Malaysia in ISIS's *Dabiq* magazine, we see few signs that the Islamic State's leaders are currently facilitating such operations.

But this situation could change quickly, and large numbers of battle-hardened, ideologically driven fighters may start flowing back to their home countries, perhaps because of a change in ISIS policy or even due to the Islamic State suffering major military reversals. The threat level would rise significantly were this to happen and both government and civil society could be expected to dramatically intensify their counter-terrorism efforts, particularly with regard to policing.

ISIS has also dramatically changed the dynamics within Indonesian jihadist communities. It has created deep cleavages, leaving some organizations greatly weakened, while breathing new life into a number of others.

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<sup>51</sup> 'Survey: Malaysians more worried about climate change, global economy, than IS', *The Malay Mail Online*, 17 July 2015.

Ba'asyir's JAT had been one of the major sites for militant thinking and activity in Indonesia over the past seven years but it has been left a rump by the departure of most of its members after Ba'asyir declared his support for ISIS. JI had been languishing since the mid-2000s, having lost much of its leadership to the counter-terrorism crackdown and much of its jihadist credibility after turning away from violent activity. But the Syrian conflict and rise of ISIS have led to JI's revival. Its involvement in anti-ISIS and anti-Assad campaigns in Syria has restored its status as an active jihadist organization and membership is growing again, as also are the range of activities that it undertakes.

Importantly, no major Islamist or jihadist group is neutral on the subject of ISIS -- such is the divisive nature of the Islamic State, its ideology and its actions. The large majority of jihadist groups in Indonesia are opposed to ISIS. In Malaysia, where hard line Islamists are less well organized, it is probably also the case that most jihadists reject ISIS, though the institutional form that this takes is more difficult to discern. This opposition to ISIS from within jihadist communities serves as one of the brakes upon the Islamic State's growth. In the longer term, though, the anti-ISIS jihadist groups could well return to violence against their own governments and societies. They do not reject ISIS because it wages violent jihad; rather they oppose it because the timing and form of that jihad is not in accord with their views on the proper conduct of holy war.

## Implications for the US Government

The principal implications for the US government of the growing influence of ISIS on the jihadist community in Southeast Asia are three-fold: First, there is the risk that increasing numbers of Indonesians and Malaysians will actively support ISIS or *al-Nusra*, including but is not limited to traveling to the Middle East to join the jihadist fight there. Second, there is the risk that Indonesian and Malaysian jihadists who fight in the Middle East will bring their skills and dedication back to Southeast Asia, thereby raising the threat of terrorist attack in their home countries. Third, there is the risk that Indonesians and Malaysians inspired by the goals of the Islamic State but who cannot or will not travel to the Middle East will renew or initiate jihadist violence in their own countries (or perhaps elsewhere in Southeast Asia).

At present, the numbers of Indonesians and Malaysians going to the Middle East are relatively small in absolute terms, but have become sizeable relative to the number of those who were involved in earlier jihadist movements abroad. The number of people who are potentially receptive to calls for jihad, however, is significantly larger than those already involved in extremist groups. Assuming that ISIS does not implode in the near future, the trend with regard to the recruitment and deployment of Southeast Asians will be a contest between, on the one hand, the skills and resources of the pro-ISIS and *al-Nusra* networks, and on the other hand, the ability of the Indonesian and Malaysian governments to disrupt and degrade the recruitment processes, combined with the ability of Muslim organizations and the media to project credible counter-narratives. Overall, though support for ISIS in Indonesia and Malaysia is confined to pockets of the Islamic community and this is only likely to change for the worse if ISIS (a) scores significant new military victories or (b) implodes, resulting in hundreds of fighters returning to Indonesia and Malaysia, or (c) directs its Southeast Asian fighters to conduct violent attacks at home. There is not a high probability of these occurring within the next year or so.

What role can and should the US government play? The answer needs to factor in two major and potentially conflicting realities: First, the opportunities are limited for Western and particularly American engagement on CT issues in both Malaysia and Indonesia. Second, while the current level of risk is relatively low, there is a real possibility that it will increase if there is a significant change in ISIS's prospects and strategy.

To begin with, the opportunities to assist substantively with counter-terrorism policing and intelligence are much reduced compared to 10-15 years ago. Malaysia's Special Branch allows only limited cooperation with foreign agencies and zealously guards its sources of information. Indonesia's police have dramatically improved their forensic skills, database management and operational training over the past ten years and now believe that they are much less in need of foreign assistance than in the past.

However, the Joko Widodo government's broad approach to counter-terrorism policy may be one area where the US government could exert a beneficial influence. Several specific areas need consideration:

- The first would be advising the Indonesian government against greatly expanding the role of the armed forces (TNI) in counter-terrorism tasks. TNI has not traditionally had a sophisticated grasp of terrorism issues and is inclined to use heavy-handed measures. Moreover, Indonesia's democratization requires the military to keep as much as possible in the barracks rather than engaging in complex civil security operations that ought to be the preserve of the police.
- Second, BNPT's performance has been below expectations and much could be done to lift the quality of its work. Greater resources to analysis of terrorist ideological and organisation trends, better prison de-radicalisation programs for jihadist inmates, more sophisticated anti-terrorism campaigns that more closely target at-risk communities are just some of the areas in which BNPT could improve.
- Third, prisons remain a major problem and successive Indonesian governments have done little to ameliorate the situation. Not only are prisons sites of recruitment to ISIS and other jihadist groups, they are also largely failing in their efforts to persuade inmates from disengaging from terrorist activities. Better funded and better researched prison programs could make a significant difference.

Another area where the USG and USAID in particular could play a useful role would be in supporting the development of better monitoring and analysis of violent religious extremism, including jihadist violence, in Indonesia. The USG and particularly USAID could provide support to researchers and institutions that analyze jihadist groups and publicize their findings. But the scope for helping Indonesia-based organizations is limited, as many are reluctant to accept funding or in-kind assistance from a Western government for fear that it will taint their reputation. Related to this, the USG might consider encouraging its Indonesian and Malaysian counterparts to release regularly more information to the public on the nature of the ISIS threat and operations. This would help citizens to identify potentially dangerous pro-ISIS messages and activities as well as persuade them that their government's CT policies and actions are based on solid information and analysis, and are therefore credible.

Both the Indonesian and Malaysian governments could also be enjoined to pursue genuinely moderate domestic Islamic agendas. The US State Department's recent annual reporting on religious rights in Indonesia and Malaysia records the declining tolerance in both nations. Over the past decade successive Indonesian governments have paid lip service to religious tolerance but have not vigorously acted to stop sectarian groups that engage in vigilante violence towards religious minorities. There is some research indicating that members of vigilante Islamist groups are prone to recruitment by more extreme movements, including those that are pro-ISIS. In the Malaysian case, the moderate Islamic image it projects internationally is not reflected in domestic policy that is increasingly sectarian and hostile not only to minority religious rights but also to progressive Muslim views.

Finally, the USG needs to keep in mind that ISIS has revitalized (but also divided) the jihadist community in Southeast Asia. This represents a significant new dynamic which has the potential to evolve in difficult-to-predict ways. Given this, it will be important for the USG to have a nuanced understanding of the Islamic State's influence on Islamic discourse in Indonesia and Malaysia. And it will be important to have the capacity to monitor the flow of Indonesians and Malaysians to the Middle East as well as the reverse flow of returnees.