

RSIS Commentary is a platform to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy-relevant commentary and analysis of topical and contemporary issues. The authors' views are their own and do not represent the official position of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced with prior permission from RSIS and due recognition to the author(s) and RSIS. Please email to Mr Yang Razali Kassim, Editor RSIS Commentary at RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg.

New Pro-Islamic State Magazine: A Persistent Ideological Threat

By Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff & Jasminder Singh

SYNOPSIS

The Islamic State (IS) terrorist group, persists to propagate its ideas to the Indonesian and Malay speaking communities through its supporters in the new Hanifiyah Media magazine. Apart from spreading its ideas on religion and politics, the latest pro-IS propaganda also serves as a riposte to current counter-ideological initiatives.

COMMENTARY

On 22 November 2018, the first edition of a pro-IS magazine in Indonesian, was published through an Indonesian media, named Hanifiyah Media. It is a monthly publication, which is now in its third edition varying between 40 to 50 pages long. The magazine has no title and draws its heading according to the theme it covers each month. The first was *Zhahirina 'Alal Haq* (we are on the righteous path); the second, *Fie Sabilillah* (in the cause of Allah); and the latest, *Ansharullah* (supporters of Allah).

The three pro-IS editions have communicated systematically to raise readers' awareness of "counter-IS propaganda" and "disinformation" (fake news) about the group. The editions attempt to project IS' credibility and authenticity through religious and emotional appeals. Their underlying messages are emotional rallying points that enable the priming of their readers. For example, the key narrative of the first edition is that the "truth" comes only from IS and its mouthpiece, decrying non-IS and mainstream publications, be they on religious or political issues. This is critical in rebuilding the trust and maintaining the support of IS' members, supporters and sympathisers, especially after the group's battlefield and territorial losses in Iraq and Syria.

Debunking Counter-Narrative Message

The Hanifiyah Media magazine is generally fashioned after the now discontinued IS propaganda magazine in Indonesian language the [Al-Fatihin](#). One similarity is the use of religious arguments in a bid to maintain IS' religious credibility. The magazine validates such arguments by citing various religious sources, primarily from the Quran and prophetic texts.

Significantly, the magazine exploits Islamic historical moments and events to counter the ideological narratives which have emerged against the IS. These are historical moments and events, which have shaped the values, norms and morals of the Muslim community. The magazine attempts to hijack the mainstream Muslim understanding of these historical moments and events by supplanting them with IS' skewed interpretations and pseudo-religious values. An example illustrated by the magazine is the IS' definition of *jihad* as experienced in Islamic history. In one of its articles, the magazine attempts to convince readers that *jihad* has always been about "*qital*", ie. waging war and violence, debunking dominant counter-narratives that argue jihad as being non-violent. It insists that *jihad* has and will always be an "armed" struggle.

In maintaining the emotional and religious appeals of their propaganda just as the Al-Fatihin had done in the past, the Hanifiyah Media magazine continues to emphasise core IS objectives such as *jihad*, *i'dad* (*preparation for jihad*), *hijrah* (*migration*), and *syahid* (*martyrdom*). Expressing these objectives through the lens of seventh century Islam, the magazine's narrative of related historical stories seeks to motivate individuals into action, similar to how the companions of the Prophet had sacrificed for him. The magazine portrays IS fighters as heroic underdogs struggling to fight injustice and evil for a supposed sacred Islamic ideal and a better future in the form of its utopian version of a "pure" community.

The Hanifiyah Media magazine also continues to propound Islamic eschatological discourse that has been one of the most powerful narratives underpinning IS' ability to mobilise as an organisation globally. The magazine's persistence in highlighting the importance of being part of a group that partakes in the end of time suggests the IS' continued reliance on the Final Hour narratives, to attract and galvanise more recruits.

Going Forward

Whether Al-Fatihin or Hanifiyah Media, the objectives of the propaganda remain the same. It instils a "victim" mentality, providing the impetus for Muslims to rise and fight against the oppressing authority or government regardless of country. It also continues to spread hatred, enmity, and sow discord and distrust within communities.

The emergence of the Hanifiyah Media magazine can be seen as a push-back against counter-ideological efforts in various Indonesian- and Malay-speaking countries, so as not to further lose in the ideological warfare, given IS' major territorial losses. Such counter-ideological efforts, conducted in the mainstream media and other domains, have made an impact by exposing the false narratives of the IS, especially on key Islamic concepts which have been misinterpreted by the terrorist outfit.

For many societies, banning the magazine may not be a fool-proof solution as online radicalisation is far more complex and challenging, but allowing it to be freely

circulated, without challenge, will be detrimental to their security and social cohesion. Therefore, it is important for policy makers and counter-ideological experts to maintain their efforts to expose and respond against IS and pro-IS propaganda. There should not be any let up in countering the IS' damaging ideological narratives because the ideological war will persist for some time, in spite of the IS' territorial losses.

Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff is an Associate Research Fellow with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. Jasminder Singh is an alumnus of RSIS.

Nanyang Technological University

Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
Tel: +65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg