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South East Asia's Evolving and Resilient Military Landscape

The Islamic State's (IS) territorial losses and military defeat in Iraq and Syria have not weakened the militant landscape in Southeast Asia. Rather, the regional threat landscape has become more resilient and competitive, with pro-IS militant groups exhibiting better operational capabilities, knowledge of explosive-making and networking linkages. Moreover, pro-IS groups in the region have found traction by exploiting local issues to spread the terror group's extremist ideology.

Several major challenges have emerged from the recent setback to IS in the Middle East. First is the issue of returning foreign fighters (FTFs) and how to deal with them. Such returnees pose a plethora of legal, political and security challenges to Southeast countries, particularly Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. A second challenge is IS' efforts to declare new wilayat (provinces) in different parts of the world. While IS has officially declared the East Asia wilayat based in the Philippines, the declaration of new wilayat cannot be ruled out as witnessed in South Asia and Africa. Further, terrorist groups such as IS constantly require increasing financial resources to expand and sustain their operations. In Southeast Asia, IS-linked groups have set up Islamic charities to raise funds and conceal their activities.

Against this backdrop, the September issue of the Counter Terrorists Trends and Analyses (CTTA) features four articles looking at different aspects and dimensions of Southeast Asia's threat landscape in the post-territorial caliphate environment. The first article by **V. Arianti and Nur Aziemah Azman** argues that the IS fighters in Indonesia may continue to empower their affiliated groups in the country. According to the authors, this is evident by the apparent attempts by Indonesian IS fighters in Syria to create a wilayah (province) in Indonesia by strengthening two Indonesian militant groups, the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT, Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia) and Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD, Congregation of Supporters of IS). IS acknowledged Indonesia as part of its East Asia Wilayah (encompassing primarily the Philippines and Indonesia) in July 2018.

In the second article, **Sylvia Windya Lakshmi** examines the nexus between charities and terrorism financing, through the case-study of the IS-affiliated Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) in Indonesia. Given recent reports of convictions around the world of non-profit organisations that misuse their revenues to finance the activities of terrorists, the article

details three themes that emerge from JAD's activities in Indonesia: (i) sham charities set up by the group as a conduit to generate funds to ensure its sustainability; (ii) funds raised for charitable causes funneled into terrorist activities and (iii) social media used to not only recruit members but also raise funds. Given IS' focus on global expansion in the post-caliphate era, the multi-pronged threat posed by its affiliate networks in Indonesia and surrounding region, of which terrorism financing is a component, will need to be addressed by policymakers and security agencies going forward.

The next article by **Amalina Abdul Nasir** upholds that despite numerous setbacks in Syria, IS is quite determined to stay alive in Malaysia. The pro-IS Malaysian militant groups are exploiting local issues to advance the terror group's extremist ideology. In this new phase, according to the author, Malaysian IS supporters have acquired better bomb-making capabilities and fostered deeper operational linkages with foreign militants. Moreover, Malaysia is also dealing with the issue of returning fighters. The Malaysian policymakers need to ensure an effective rehabilitation policy in dealing with returning militants and to continue to carefully manage the ethnic and religious climate in Malaysia so as to minimise exploitation of related local issues by pro-IS groups.

Finally, **Kenneth Yeo** discusses the prospects for a consolidation of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in the Southern Philippines following IS' territorial losses this year. According to the author, IS' weakened presence in the Iraq-Syria theatre has positioned the Philippines as an attractive destination for FTFs in Southeast Asia given its status as an alternate conflict theatre within jihadist discourse. The article argues there could be a consolidation of rebel forces in hotspots such as Mindanao, with IS affiliated groups seeking to complement local fighters with FTFs and youth militants to launch attacks and gain territory. With the added impetus of a leadership transition within IS' networks in the Philippines, comprehensive counter-terrorism measures are needed to address these developments, which also have regional implications.

In conclusion, this is the first quarterly issue, following the earlier announced transition from a monthly publication. The next quarterly will be issued in January 2020. Thank you for your continued subscription!

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The IS Threat in Indonesia

V. Arianti and Nur Aziemah Azman

Synopsis

This article examines the threat of the Islamic State (IS) in Indonesia, arguing that Indonesian IS fighters may continue to empower their affiliated groups in Indonesia in the post-caliphate environment. This is backed by the attempts of Indonesian IS fighters in Syria in recent years to create a wilayah (province) in Indonesia by empowering Indonesian militant groups, namely the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT, Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia) and Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD, Congregation of Supporters of IS). Indonesia has since been acknowledged as part of IS' East Asia Wilayah (encompassing primarily the Philippines and Indonesia) in July 2018. Such a status is likely to continue to keep the wilayah aspirations of pro-IS Indonesian jihadists alive today.

Introduction

The IS declaration of a self-styled "caliphate" in June 2014 significantly increased the terrorist threat in Indonesia. Since then, multiple terrorist attacks and plots in the country have been linked to IS or its inspired and affiliated militant groups and fighters. Between 2015 and 2018, as many as 808 terrorist suspects, most of whom were pro-IS, were arrested in Indonesia. Likewise, from 2017 to 2018, around 41 were killed in counter-terrorism operations¹. Moreover, around 671 Indonesians, including 524 men, 147 women and 99 children, joined IS, rendering Indonesia the largest contributor of foreign fighters to IS in Southeast Asia.² IS' military defeat in Syria and Iraq culminated in

the fall of the terror group's last stronghold in Baghouz, in March 2019. As a result, the remaining (144) Indonesian fighters have been killed, imprisoned or displaced.

Against this backdrop, this article discusses the Indonesian threat landscape in two sections. The first section elaborates on how Indonesian IS fighters have empowered their affiliate groups in Indonesia in a bid to create a wilayah in the country. The second section analyses the possible continuity of such empowerment following the fall of Baghouz.

Attempts to Create a Wilayah in Indonesia

Wilayah, an extension of the physical territory of the IS "caliphate", can be seen as IS' attempt to grow its influence, especially since 2015 when it began to gradually lose territories in Syria and Iraq. Creating a wilayah contributes to IS' sphere of influence, which is done by visibly increasing IS' presence, organising local groups that can give IS a viable military presence and ultimately a state-like representation in the area in question, and providing them with resources and training to increase their effectiveness in combat.³

As such, the Indonesian IS fighters, by tapping the funds received from IS central, have empowered the MIT and JAD. Their aspiration to create a wilayah is evident, for instance, in the creation of JAD. JAD unified various pro-IS militant groups in Indonesia under its umbrella. This is in line with the November 2014 issue of Dabiq, wherein IS outlined the unification of multiple groups as

¹ The data is compiled from "2018, Aksi Teror dan Jumlah Terduga Teroris Yang Ditangkap Meningkat," *Berita Benar*, December 27, 2018, <https://www.benarnews.org/indonesian/berita/teroris-me-2018-12272018142403.html>.

² "97 dari 671 WNI Gabung ISIS di Suriah Tewas," *Berita Satu*, September 19, 2017, [https://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/453442/97-dari-](https://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/453442/97-dari-671-wni-gabung-isis-di-suriah-tewas)

[671-wni-gabung-isis-di-suriah-tewas](https://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/453442/97-dari-671-wni-gabung-isis-di-suriah-tewas); 524 men comprised of 239 adults and 59 children. Several children were involved in combat. Indonesian women in IS do not participate in combat.

³ Jolene Jerard and Nur Aziemah Azman, "Wilayah Philippines: Are We There Yet?" *The Journal of the Australian Institute of Professional Intelligence Officers* Vol. 25, No. 1, 2017, pp. 3-24.

one of the key requirements for wilayah declaration.⁴

According to an IS video titled “The Structure of the Khilafah” released on July 7, 2016, which expounds on IS’ structure of governance, the wilayah (plural of wilayah) is defined as “regional divisions set up to facilitate the affairs of governance in the caliphate that is necessary to administer and supervise the territories controlled by the group”.⁵ JAD’s aspiration for Indonesia to be recognised as an IS’ wilayah was also reflected in its organisational structure. The structure was seemingly designed as a nucleus to serve the affairs of governance once the desired wilayah in Indonesia is established. The structure consisted of the headquarters and leaders in charge of the regional/provincial territories and district branches across Indonesia’s main islands – Java, Kalimantan and Sulawesi.⁶

MIT’s aspiration for Indonesia to become an IS wilayah was apparent when it proclaimed itself Daulah Indonesia Timur (Islamic State of Eastern Indonesia), portraying itself to be part of the IS wilayah in Indonesia.⁷ It also posted a statement using the format, colour and design of IS official statements in an Arabic jihadi online forum, Shumukh Al-Islam Network.⁸ This can be seen as an attempt to appear as if IS has formally acknowledged MIT as an IS affiliate and, by extension, Indonesia as an IS wilayah. Unfortunately, the statement posted did not carry a logo of

“Wilayah Indonesia,” as is typical of IS official statements, but of MIT only. It has been observed that in the absence of an official writ announcing the formation of a wilayah, the official IS wilayah/provincial media logos provide the directional signs pointing towards the established wilayah.⁹

i. Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT)

MIT, based in Poso, Central Sulawesi, was led by militant leader Santoso and had been actively conducting small-scale attacks against the police since 2011. It pledged allegiance to IS a few days after the “caliphate” was declared, through a video that was sent to Salim Mubarak At-Tamimi alias Abu Jandal, an Indonesian IS fighter in Syria who had access to IS leadership. Since then, the Indonesian IS fighters had assisted MIT by providing them weapons, logistics and manpower. MIT’s financing for weapons (procured in Southern Philippines) and logistics were provided by the network of BahrumSyah, an Indonesian fighter who led IS’ Syria-based Southeast Asia military unit, Katibah Nusantara.¹⁰ MIT planned to host at least 12 Uighur radicals, but six of them were arrested.¹¹ The Batam network of Bahrn Naim, another Indonesian IS fighter, led by Gigih Rahmat Dewa had facilitated the entrance of two Uighurs via Batam and provided logistical support for MIT.¹² IS fighters’ assistance seemed to have improved MIT’s armaments that included anti-tank weapons.¹³

⁴ V. Arianti and Jasminder Singh, “ISIS’ Southeast Asia Unit: Raising the Security Threat,” *RS/S Commentary* No. 220, October 19, 2015.

⁵ Jolene Jerard and Nur Aziemah Azman, op.cit.

⁶ “JAD Pernah Gelar Pertemuan Nasional Berkedok Latihan Obat Herbal,” *Detik News*, May 18, 2018, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4026916/jad-pernah-gelar-pertemuan-nasional-berkedok-latihan-obat-herbal>.

⁷ “MIT Rilis Risalah Kepada Umat Islam tentang Pengepungan yang Dilakukan oleh Pasukan Ahzab,” *Shoutussalam*, February 2015.

⁸ “Terkini,” MIT Press, posted on Shumukh Al-Islam Network Forum, August 2015.

⁹ Jolene Jerard and Nur Aziemah Azman, op.cit.;

¹⁰ Verdict of Ahmet Mahmud, Abdullah, and Abdulbasit Tuzer, Directory of Verdict, Supreme Court of Indonesia, No. 208/PID/2015/PT DKI, <https://putusan.mahkamahagung.go.id/putusan/808e5b2562f14486f2c70a09674918ac>; “Disunity Among Indonesian ISIS Supporters and The Risk of More Violence,” *IPAC Report* No. 25, February 1, 2016.

¹¹ V. Arianti, “The IT Jihadist in Batam: Gigih Rahmat Dewa,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol.

8, Issue 11, (November 2016), pp. 11-14; “Keempat Suku Uighur Tertangkap di Poso Akan Diadili,” *Benarnews*, March 19, 2015,

<https://www.benarnews.org/indonesian/berita/keempat-orang-suku-uighur-akan-diadili-03192015193056.html>.

¹² V. Arianti, “The IT Jihadist in Batam: Gigih Rahmat Dewa,” op.cit.

¹³ “Inilah Senjata Anti-Tank Milik Kelompok Santoso,” *FKPT Sulteng*, August 21, 2015, <http://fkptsulteng.damai.id/2015/08/21/inilah-senjata-anti-tank-milik-kelompok-santoso/>; “Usai Baku Tembak di Poso, “Polisi Temukan Senjata Anti-Tank,” *Tribun News*, March 2, 2016, <http://www.tribunnews.com/regional/2016/03/02/usai-baku-tembak-di-poso-polisi-temukan-senjata-anti-tank>; “Densus 88 Baku Tembak Dengan Teroris, Senjata Anti-Tank Ditemukan,” *Merdeka*, August 18, 2015,

<http://www.tribunnews.com/regional/2016/03/02/usai-baku-tembak-di-poso-polisi-temukan-senjata-anti-tank>; “ISIS Suplai Kelompok Teroris Santoso Senjata Anti Tank,” *Rakyatku*, April 18, 2016,

By January 2016, MIT had around 45 fighters in its ranks, an increase from 28 the year before.¹⁴ Intensive joint police and army counter-terrorism operations in Poso subsequently halted MIT's wilayah aspiration in Poso,¹⁵ especially after Santoso was killed in July 2016.¹⁶ By September 2016, six Uighurs who fought with MIT were killed.¹⁷ As of March 2019, around seven MIT members – carrying three firearms with rudimentary bomb-making skills and under the leadership of Santoso's successor Ali Kalora – are still operational in the mountains of Poso.¹⁸

ii. *Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD)*

Another IS-affiliated Indonesian group, JAD, was founded by pro-IS ideologue Aman Abdurrahman in October 2014.¹⁹ JAD aimed to support IS by spreading its ideological propaganda, sending fighters to Syria²⁰, and conducting attacks in Indonesia. JAD comprised of Aman Abdurrahman's students; some elements of other Islamist extremist groups such as Darul Islam (DI), Firqoh Abu Hamzah, Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) as well as other radicalised individuals.

JAD conducted its first attack in Jakarta in January 2016 that left eight people dead, including the four attackers. The attacks also

marked the start of a series of subsequent attacks by JAD and its network in Indonesia.²¹ The group's ambition was supported by IS. JAD's leaders – Hari Budiman alias Abu Musa and subsequently Zainal Anshori – worked under Rois alias Iwan Darmawan, who is on death row for his involvement in the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta.²² Rois managed the funds, most of which were used to prepare for attacks (weapons procurement and military training in southern Philippines and the 2016 Jakarta attack). At least US\$15,384 was transferred by Indonesian IS fighter Abu Jandal for the January 2016 Jakarta attacks.²³ Counter-terrorism operations against JAD have since been intensified, resulting in a crippling of the group's organisational structure. However, some JAD cells remain active and continue to collaborate with non-JAD IS supporters.

Subsequent developments showed that Indonesian IS fighters are shifting their focus of assistance to groups in the Philippines. This seems to be the policy of IS as reflected in its two videos in mid-2016 and 2017 that called for the migration of fighters to southern Philippines.²⁴ Funds from IS were also diverted for the May 2017 Marawi siege. In early 2017, funds provided by IS, via Indonesia, for Marawi amounted to

<http://news.rakyatku.com/read/719/2016/04/18/isis-suplai-kelompok-teroris-santoso-senjata-anti-tank>.

¹⁴ "Polisi Merilis 17 Nama Baru Teroris Poso,"

Tempo, January 23, 2016,

<https://m.tempo.co/read/news/2016/01/20/078737928/polisi-merilis-17-nama-baru-teroris-poso>; "DPO Teroris Poso Bertambah 17 Nama, Tiga Orang Perempuan," *Kompas*, January 20, 2016, <http://regional.kompas.com/read/2016/01/20/10372871/DPO.Teroris.Poso.Bertambah.17.Nama.Tiga.Orang.Perempuan>.

¹⁵ Rohan Gunaratna, "The Emerging Wilayah in the Philippines," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 8, Issue 5, (May 2016), pp. 22-27.

¹⁶ "Santoso Tewas dengan Luka Tembak di Perut dan Punggung," *Liputan 6*, July 20, 2016,

<https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/2556937/santoso-tewas-dengan-luka-tembak-di-perut-dan-punggung>.

¹⁷ "Uighur Terakhir di MIT Tewas Ditembak di Poso," *Benarnews*, August 17, 2016,

<https://www.benarnews.org/indonesian/berita/uighur-poso-08172016133626.html>.

¹⁸ "Polisi Sebut Anggota Kelompok Ali Kalora Tinggal 7 Orang," *Tempo*, March 23, 2019,

<https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1188319/polisi-sebut-anggota-kelompok-ali-kalora-tinggal-7-orang>.

¹⁹ "Hari Ini, "Jaksa Tuntut Dedengkot JAD Aman Abdurrahman," *Bisnis.com*, May 18, 2018,

<https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20180518/15/796727/hari-ini-jaksa-tuntut-dedengkot-jad-aman-abdurrahman->

²⁰ This was in line with the release of several IS videos targeting pro-IS audience in Southeast Asia in 2014 and 2015 which called for migration to and waging jihad with IS in Iraq and Syria. This was in addition to the same calls for *hijrah* made in the first three issues of the Dabiq magazine series in 2014.

²¹ V. Arianti, "Aman Abdurrahman: Ideologue and 'Commander' of IS Supporters in Indonesia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* Vol. 2, Issue 2, (February 2017), pp. 4-9.

²² Adi Renaldi, "The Inside Story of JAD, Indonesia's Newest, and Deadliest, Terrorist Group," *Vice*, May 31, 2018,

https://www.vice.com/en_asia/article/pav339/the-inside-story-of-jad-indonesias-newest-and-deadliest-terrorist-group

²³ "ISIS Funded Attack in Jakarta," *The Straits Times*, March 5, 2016,

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/isis-funded-attack-in-jakarta>.

²⁴ The video features fighters from Indonesia (Abu Walid), Malaysia (Abu 'Aun Al-Malizi), and the Philippines (Abu Abdul Rahman Al-Filibini); The 2017 'Inside the Caliphate' video features Singaporean IS fighter Abu Ukayl.

US\$55,000. They were sent by Indonesian IS fighter Mohd Karim Yusop Faiz alias Abu Walid through a Mindanao-based Malaysian, Dr Mahmud Ahmad. The amount did not include those from IS fighters who sponsored the travel expenses of several Indonesians to Marawi.²⁵ The temporary shift of focus could also be partially attributed to the death of Santoso.²⁶

Outlook

Officially, Indonesia has never been acknowledged by IS as a wilayah. However, IS weekly newsletter Al-Naba' issue 140 released in July 2018 acknowledged the status of the group's East Asia affiliate (encompassing primarily the Philippines and Indonesia) as a wilayah. This occurred prior to its physical defeat, when IS had effectively restructured its wilayah in order to maintain the perception that the so-called caliphate was functioning and its presence on the ground intact.²⁷

Now that Indonesia is included in IS' East Asia Wilayah and the defeat of the caliphate has led to the scattering of surviving terrorist fighters across various regions, Indonesian IS fighters may continue to empower their affiliates in the country. The Syria-based Indonesian fighters who facilitated in the transferring of funds have been either killed (Abu Jandal, BahrumSyah, Abu Walid) or imprisoned (Munawar Kholil alias Ushdul

Wagha).²⁸ However, Saefulah, an Indonesian currently based in Afghanistan who has access to the IS leadership there, had transferred money to Indonesia. The money was sent for JAD cells in Bekasi (greater Jakarta area) that was used for an attack plot in May 2019 and in East Kalimantan for weapons procurement in the Philippines. He had also sent money for the MIT.²⁹ There is a possibility that Saefulah was fighting with IS in Syria and then moved to Afghanistan after IS lost its territories.³⁰

In addition, pro-IS Indonesian supporters still aspire to migrate (*hijrah*) to Syria or its surrounding locations where IS still operates. The *hijrah* narrative undoubtedly still has resonance. Tips and advice for those who want to migrate from Indonesia to Iraq or Syria are still discussed in pro-IS Telegram groups and channels, along with calls to go to Yemen, West Africa or Libya. Two months before the fall of Baghouz, for instance, the Indonesian IS fighter Abu Walid had transferred Rp 30 million (US\$2,307) for former terrorist inmate Hari Kuncoro to travel to Syria.³¹ Most importantly, some pro-IS Indonesian supporters have also demonstrated a particular interest to migrate to Afghanistan. At least one attempted to travel there in December 2018.³² Another group of 12 Indonesians, funded by Saefulah, was

²⁵ "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," *IPAC Report* No. 38, July 21, 2017.

²⁶ Jolene Jerard and Nur Aziemah Azman, op.cit.

²⁷ Different areas within Syria and Iraq such as Raqqa, Al-Kheir, Furat and Kirkuk that were previously identified separately as *wilayah* were grouped together under two provinces - Wilayah Al-Sham and Wilayah Iraq. Somalia and the Caucasus that previously did not secure the status of province, had also been acknowledged as IS *wilayah*. Significantly, after its physical losses in Syria and Iraq in the spring of 2019, for the purpose of increasing the number of IS provinces rather than consolidating its presence in certain locations, IS announced three new affiliates in India, Pakistan and Turkey.

²⁸ Munawar Kholil, "Teroris JAD, Perekrut 57 WNI Ikut ISIS ke Suriah," *Tirto.id*, May 15, 2019, <https://tirto.id/munawar-kholil-teroris-jad-perekrut-57-wni-ikut-isis-ke-suriah-dD8t>; "Penyandang Dana ISIS Indonesia Kelompok Teroris Taliban Melayu," *Tempo*, February 11, 2019, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1174505/penyandang-dana-isis-indonesia-kelompok-teroris-taliban-melayu/full&view=ok>; "Keluarga Benarkan Abu Jandal Tewas di Mosul," *Berita Benar*, November 9,

2016,

<https://www.benarnews.org/indonesian/berita/abu-jandal-11092016165829.html>; "AS Lancarkan Serangan Udara di Suriah Saat Pemimpin ISIS Indonesia Dinyatakan Tewas," *Benar News*, April 20, 2018,

<https://www.benarnews.org/indonesian/berita/as-isis-bahrumSyah-04202018185214.html>.

²⁹ "Polisi Beber Aliran Dana Buat JAD dari WNI Di Afghanistan," *CNN Indonesia*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20190723193946-12-414873/polisi-beber-aliran-dana-buat-jad-dari-wni-di-afghanistan>.

³⁰ "Polisi Sebut Identitas 'Mastermind' Aksis Teror di Indonesia, Penghubung ISIS, JAD, dan JAT," *BBC News*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-49081067>.

³¹ "Penyandang Dana ISIS Indonesia Kelompok Teroris Taliban Melayu," *Tempo*, February 11, 2019, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1174505/penyandang-dana-isis-indonesia-kelompok-teroris-taliban-melayu/full&view=ok>.

³² "The Ongoing Problem of Pro-ISIS Cells in Indonesia," *IPAC Report* No. 56, April 29, 2019.

arrested in Bangkok in June 2019 while en route to Afghanistan.³³

Given these developments, and the acknowledgement of IS East Asia, which incorporates Indonesia, as a wilayah, it is evident that even in a post-IS territorial defeat environment, Indonesian IS fighters will continue to empower their counterparts in Indonesia by providing them with funds for logistical, procurement and operational purposes.

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³³ "Bongkar Jaringan JAD & ISIS, Densus 88 Akan Bertemu Liaison Officer," *Tirto.id*, July 24, 2019, <https://tirto.id/bongkar-jaringan-jad-isis-densus-88-akan-bertemu-liaison-officer-eeYk>.

Nexus between Charities and Terrorist Financing In Indonesia

Sylvia Windya Laksmi

Synopsis

Around the world, charities often play a critical role in complementing governments and the private sector in meeting the essential needs of vulnerable communities. However, in recent years, a number of charity and humanitarian organisations have been accused or convicted of using their revenues to finance terrorist activities. The issue has prompted international organisations such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to recognise that charitable donations are one component of the broader issue of terrorism financing. This article outlines a nexus between charity organisations and the Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) terrorist group in Indonesia. For the country, there is a need for improved integrity mechanisms within the charity sector to prevent its abuse by terrorists. Additionally, enhanced community awareness is needed regarding monetary donations made by the public for religious purposes.

Introduction

Charities are one of several channels exploited by terrorists to solicit financial support for terrorist activities.¹ Jennifer Lynn Bell highlights both direct and indirect ways in which non-profit organisations (NPOs), which include charities, could be misused by terrorist groups. Direct misuse involves the active engagement of an organisation in conducting fundraising activities with the intention of financing terrorist activities. Conversely,

¹ Peter Romaniuk & Tom Keatinge, 'Protecting charities from terrorists ... and counterterrorists: FATF and the global effort to prevent terrorist financing through the non-profit sector,' *Crime, Law and Social Change*, December 2017

² Jennifer Lynn Bell, 'Terrorist Abuse of Non-Profit and Charities: A Proactive Approach to Preventing Terrorist Financing,' 17 *Kan. J.L. & Pub. Pol'y* 450 (2008), p. 455.

³ The Financial Action Task Force (FATF-GAFI), 'Combating the Abuse of Non-Profit Organisations (Recommendation 8)', p. 15, <http://www.fatf->

indirect misuse includes the practice of erroneously financing terrorist groups.²

Several factors can explain the nexus between charities and terrorist financing. For example, charities can be misused by terrorists and terrorist organisations to raise and divert funds, provide logistical support, encourage terrorist recruitment or otherwise support their operations. Reports of terrorists creating "sham" charities which mislead donors or engage in fraudulent fundraising have also raised concerns among policymakers and security agencies. Such abuses not only facilitate terrorist activities but also undermine donor confidence and jeopardise the integrity of charities.³ Financial donors of charities can include local and diaspora communities,⁴ overseas refugees, international guerrilla movements, religious organisations, and wealthy individuals. Donations can even be sourced from legitimate business and commercial holdings companies.⁵

Risk Factors Involving Charities

Charities are vulnerable to abuse by terrorist groups for several reasons. Such organisations enjoy 'public trust', have access to considerable sources of funds and may be cash rich. Additionally, some charities have a presence in multiple jurisdictions that provides a well-established infrastructure for cross border operations and financial transactions. Often, such operations can be located near areas exposed to terrorist activity.⁶ The

gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/BPP-combating-abuse-non-profit-organisations.pdf.

⁴ The diaspora is defined as immigrants residing in foreign countries who frequently support insurgencies or terrorists in their homelands.

⁵ Daniel Byman, et. all, 'Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements,' *Rand Corporation*, 2001, p 41-69,

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2001/MR1405.pdf.

⁶ 'An Advisory Guideline on Preventing the Misuse of Charities For Terrorist Financing,' *The Government*

involvement of some charities in humanitarian or developmental projects also leaves them open to abuse as it is harder to disentangle the sources and uses of money flows, whether for illegitimate or legitimate purposes.⁷ Terrorist organisations may take advantage of these or other characteristics to infiltrate the charity sector and misuse funds to support their activity.⁸

Jama'ah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and Islamic Charities

In several regions around Indonesia, Islamic charity groups are involved in efforts to collect and disburse funds to the poor. They include Islamic microfinance institutions which have emerged since the development of Islamic banking in Indonesia. Such institutions are an important source of financing for small entrepreneurs who typically cannot access funding for their business operations from the larger banking sector.⁹ Several individuals linked to the JAD, an IS-affiliated local terrorist network which has gained notoriety in recent years for several high profile gun and suicide attacks, have exploited such institutions with the intention of supporting terrorist activities.

One case identified in documents reviewed by the author involved two individuals, Aznop Nopriyandi and Reza Alfino, who attempted to raise funds for JAD activities in the region of Medan (North Sumatra) between 2015 and 2017, through an entity known as Baitul Maal Ummah (BMU). Separately, two other individuals, Waris Suyitno (WS) and Jajang Iqin Shodiqin (JIS), also set up Baitul Maal Tamwil (also referred to as Al Izzah or Al Izzah) in 2016, primarily to fund JAD's terrorist operations in the region of Bandung (West Java). All four individuals were subsequently

arrested by the authorities for fund-raising, recruitment and training activities.

Fund-raising technique

Aznop Nopriyandi is believed to have initially established BMU for propaganda purposes. He is said to have set up Telegram groups such as 'UKK Channel', 'Melawan Arus', 'No Pain', and 'Ulit Amri Keledai' with the intention of recruiting for the JAD. Within these closed discussion groups, participants were radicalised by jihadist discourse and some later donated to the group.¹⁰

Baitul Maal Al Izzah also set up an online channel on Telegram. Waris Suyitno and Jajang Iqin Shodiqin, as coordinators of the organisation, also invited people to attend their religious events (*dauroh*) and encouraged participants to donate to the organisation.¹¹

Fund-moving technique

Between 2016-2017, third party accounts were used to receive and hold funds raised from members of Baitul Maal Ummah and the wider community, which was managed by Aznop Nopriyandi. Among other transactions, he is said to have arranged a bank transfer of IDR 12,500,000 (US\$ 880.23), which was spent on various activities related to the organisation.¹² Besides the use of bank transfers, operatives linked to Baitul Maal Al Izzah also withdrew funds in cash through ATMs (Automated Teller Machines). Waris Suyitno is believed to have handled four such accounts including one belonging to Ahmad Syukri, who later gained notoriety as one of the suicide bombers involved in a bomb attack

of Hong Kong's Narcotics Bureau, September 2018, https://www.nd.gov.hk/pdf/guideline_e_20180929.pdf

⁷ Asia-Pacific Group On Money Laundering (APG), *Typologies Report: NPO Sector Vulnerabilities*, 22 July 2011,

<http://www.apgml.org/includes/handlers/get-document.ashx?d=b80c8fa2-41f0-455c-91d3-7ac28b5e3d4b>

⁸ 'An Advisory Guideline on Preventing the Misuse of Charities For Terrorist Financing,' *The Government of Hong Kong's Narcotics Bureau*, September 2018, https://www.nd.gov.hk/pdf/guideline_e_20180929.pdf

⁹ Mohamad Nazirwan, 'The Dynamic Role and Performance of Baitul Maal Wat Tamwil: Islamic

Community-Based Microfinance in Central Java,' *Victoria University PhD Dissertation*, February 2015, p. 151,

<http://vuir.vu.edu.au/26242/1/Mohamad%20Nazirwan.pdf>

¹⁰ The North Jakarta District Court, 2018. Court Verdict No. 1393/ PID.Sus/2017/ PN.Jak.Utr., <https://putusan.mahkamahagung.go.id/main/pencarian/?q=aznop+nopriyandi>

¹¹ The North Jakarta District Court, 2018. Court Verdict No. 1328/ PID.Sus/2017/ PN.Jak.Utr., <https://putusan.mahkamahagung.go.id/putusan/f112f90f0cd1b0540214f55aa7d0064b>

¹² The North Jakarta District Court, 2018. Court Verdict No. 1393/Pid.Sus/2017/PN Jkt.Utr.

on a bus station in Kampung Melayu, East Jakarta on 24 May 2017.¹³

Fund-using technique

Specifically, BMU used donations for their operations and to support the families of detained terrorist members. Between 2015 and 2016, BMU is believed to have furnished loans and donations to the wives of terrorist inmates. Funds were also used to purchase 20 throwing knives for military training purposes.¹⁴

Baitul Maal Al Izzah similarly spent money organising *dakwah* (missionary activities); providing incentives for members with medical needs, including those of their families; offering cash to orphans and low-income families through social programmes; and purchasing property that functioned as a transit point for members of the JAD in the Bandung area.¹⁵

Azzam Dakwah Center (ADC) - JAD nexus

Another instance of a charity organisation being exploited by terrorists in Indonesia involved the Azzam Dakwah Center (ADC),¹⁶ a religious organisation.¹⁷ Three individuals linked to the organisation, Achmad Romadlan Denny, the group's chairman; Muhammad Nur Solikin, a financial manager; and Agus Supriyadi, a public relations coordinator, were arrested in 2017 for partaking in terrorist activities. Police sources have disclosed several ways in which ADC was exploited as a vehicle for terrorist financing by the JAD.

Firstly, Azzam, who was a local leader (*Amir*) of JAD based in Central Java, is believed to have established ADC as a front organisation to cover JAD's movements. Three detained terrorists, Imam Syafii, Triyono, and Wawan Prasetyawan¹⁸ have revealed that the primary objective of establishing ADC was to conceal the activities of JAD operatives linked to the Islamic State (IS), through the funding of social programs under the auspices of a charity foundation.

Secondly, ADC's office was used to plan two bombing plots in 2016. Wahyudi, a terrorist inmate, has acknowledged that plans were discussed to use petrol bombs to attack the retail market, Alfamart in Sragen, and a restaurant, Candi Resto, located at the ADC's office in Sukoharjo, Central Java. The attacks, allegedly planned under the instruction of Nur Solikin, were framed as revenge over claims that the owner of the Candi Resto restaurant had torn pages from a copy of the Qur'an.¹⁹

ADC is said to have received funding from several sources, including direct donations from volunteers and members. Several charity drives were also conducted and funds also solicited through online advertisements and on social media platforms such as Facebook.²⁰ Several known terrorists also contributed to the ADC, mostly through Nur Solikin, who often used his wife as a proxy to receive these funds. Bahrun Naim, a prominent Indonesian terrorist leader who was based in Syria, was a notable contributor to the ADC, primarily operating through his wife Rafiqah Hanum. Some of the funds raised were intended for a planned bombing plot in Bekasi.²¹

¹³ "Police release identities of Jakarta suicide bombers", *The Jakarta Post*, 27 May 2017, available at:

<https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/05/27/police-release-identities-of-jakarta-suicide-bombers.html>

¹⁴ The North Jakarta District Court, 2018. Court Verdict No. 1393/PID.Sus/2017/PN.Jak.Utr., <https://putusan.mahkamahagung.go.id/main/pencarian/?q=aznop+nopriyandi>

¹⁵ The North Jakarta District Court, 2018. Court Verdict No. 1328/Pid.Sus/2017/PN.Jkt Utr., <https://putusan.mahkamahagung.go.id/putusan/f112f90f0cd1b0540214f55aa7d0064b>

¹⁶ ADC is a charity organisation established in 2015 with the primary objective of raising and channelling funds towards social activities as well as religious festivals. Programmes run by ADC include fund-raising activities, recitations, as well as voluntary

donation drives for the poor, natural disasters assistance, mosques.

¹⁷ Charlie Campbell, "ISIS unveiled: the story behind Indonesia's first female suicide bomber", *TIME Online*, 3 March 2017,

<https://time.com/4689714/indonesia-isis-terrorism-jihad-extremism-dian-yulia-novi-fpi/>

¹⁸ The High Court of Jakarta District, 2018. Court Verdict No. 189/PID.SUS/2018/PT.DKI., <https://putusan.mahkamahagung.go.id/putusan/downloadpdf/6b8f20f98a32ae6386e719d51810e3c5/pdf>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Wanda Indana, "Kedok di Balik Dana Kemanusiaan", *Medcom.id*, May 18, 2018, <https://www.medcom.id/telusur/medcom-files/GbmjXzPk-kedok-di-balik-dana-kemanusiaan>

²¹ The East Jakarta District Court, 2018. Court Verdict No. 394/Pid.Sus/2017/PN Jkt.Tim.

Funds were also used for operational and organisational purposes, including helping terrorists²², as well as their families. Money was also channeled towards the purchase of explosive materials to make bombs, and to also establish a network of IS supporters, or *anshor daullah* to fight for the jihadist cause.²³

Conclusion

Protecting charities from abuse by terrorists is a crucial component of the global fight against terrorism. In Indonesia, the case studies involving the Baitul Maal organisations and the religious organisation ADC bring to the forefront instances of religious groups and charities being exploited by terrorists. In assessing the nexus between these organisations and JAD, three main themes emerge.

Firstly, terrorists deliberately set up such organisations as a conduit to generate money to ensure their sustainability. Secondly, instead of channeling money into charitable causes, they funnel these funds into terrorist activities, including providing support for their members and extended families. Lastly, such groups use social media platforms not only to communicate with members, but also to facilitate their financing efforts. Such funds are also used to finance both direct and indirect operations, such as purchasing safe houses and transit shelters, military equipment, weapons as well as food and fuel.

²² Yudha Satriawan, "Densus 88 Geledah Sejumlah Lokasi di Solo", *VoA Indonesia*, December 11, 2016, <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/polisi-anti-teror-sita-barang-bukti-di-solo-terkait-kasus-bom-bekasi/3631682.html>

²³ The High Court of Jakarta District, 2018. Court Verdict No. 189/PID.SUS/2018/PT.DKI., <https://putusan.mahkamahagung.go.id/putusan/downloadpdf/6b8f20f98a32ae6386e719d51810e3c5/pdf>

²⁴ David Kenner, "All ISIS Has Left Is Money. Lots of It.", *The Atlantic*, March 24, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/03/isis-caliphate-money-territory/584911/>

²⁵ The Regional Risk Assessment on NPOs provides a snapshot of NPOs' financial activities in the region, the current terrorist financing risk landscape as well as an assessment of threats. The report also offers some priority actions to overcome the issues involving NPOs identified in the assessment.

²⁶ 'Regional Risk Assessment on Non-Profit Organizations and Terrorist Financing 2017,' *Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre*

Despite the loss of IS' remaining territories in Syria earlier this year, JAD's network around Indonesia continues to be closely allied to IS. Various politico-religious factors prevalent in Indonesia also mean the country will remain a hotbed for jihadist activity for the foreseeable future. Moreover, IS' adoption of an insurgency model in the post-caliphate era has meant affiliate networks around the world are urged to wage jihad in their respective local communities, and self-finance such activities.²⁴ In the Indonesian context, threat groups may increasingly seek to use "benign" charities as front organisations to finance terrorist activities going forward.

To address the issue of terrorism financing, Southeast Asian countries generated a risk assessment report²⁵ on NPOs in 2017.²⁶ In the same year, the Indonesian government also issued a Presidential Decree No. 18.²⁷ However, more robust measures are needed to mitigate the misuse of charities for terrorist financing purposes.

Two challenges stand out going forward in the Indonesian context. First, there is still no single government institution which has the power to regulate, manage, and monitor NPOs, including charities, in Indonesia. Such an institution needs to be armed with sufficient powers to verify the identity of beneficial owners, donors, money flows, as well as an organisation's line of activity. Second, technological advances have enabled terrorist groups to seek funding through social media platforms²⁸, a strategy which is often

Report, https://www.austrac.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-06/regional-NPO-risk-assessment-WEB-READY_ss.pdf

²⁷ The Presidential Decree is focused on the procedures of receiving and donating money by private organisations in preventing terrorist financing. It includes a definition of charities and requires civil society organisations to apply a Know Your Customers (KYC) policy to those who donate money above IDR 5 million (US\$ 384) and report any suspicious charities linked with individuals based in countries that are not accredited with the Financial Action Task Force on Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing (FATF).

²⁸ Resti Woro Yuniar, "Support for Islamic State? In Indonesia, there's an app for that", *South China Morning Post*, November 8, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2118968/support-islamic-state-indonesia-theres-app>

interwoven with their propaganda efforts. The Indonesian government should remain vigilant on these issues and initiate appropriate counter-measures.

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IS' Determination to Stay Relevant and Visible in Malaysia

Amalina Abdul Nasir

Synopsis

As the Islamic State gradually morphs into a global insurgent movement, the world grapples with new security threats posed by the terror group. IS' video issued in April featuring its leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi was aimed at renewing the resilience of its followers. Determined to stay alive, Malaysian pro-IS groups exploit local issues to advance IS' extremist ideology. In this new phase, IS supporters in Malaysia have acquired better bomb-making capabilities and fostered deeper operational linkages with foreign militants. Malaysia is also dealing with the issue of returning fighters. Against this backdrop, policymakers need to ensure an effective rehabilitation policy in dealing with returning militants and to continue to carefully manage the ethnic and religious climate in Malaysia so as to minimise exploitation of related local issues by pro-IS groups.

Introduction

The fall of Baghouz in March 2019 marked the end of the so-called Islamic State's (IS) territorial caliphate resulting in the killing, arrests and displacement of thousands of foreign fighters. A total of 41,000 fighters were believed to have travelled to Iraq and Syria to join IS, including 800 from Southeast Asia.¹ Some of these foreign fighters have returned to their home countries and were found to be involved in plotting attacks back home.

Different countries have grappled with the issue of returning fighters in different ways. For instance, the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) have stripped the citizenship of the Islamist radicals who joined IS and barred them from coming home. These measures were put in place even before the collapse of Baghouz. On its part, the Malaysian government issued a conditional offer to Syria-based IS-linked Malaysian militants and their families to return in July 2018. This offer involved security checks and enforcements, as well as a one-month rehabilitation programme.² Since the offer was made, of 102 Malaysians who joined IS in Iraq and Syria, 11 have returned. Of the remaining 91 fighters, 40 have been killed fighting in battle or as suicide bombers. During the last phase of the battle in Baghouz, 13 more Malaysians approached the Malaysian government to return. According to Malaysian media, during the second week of March, this number quickly rose to 39, mainly comprising women and children, and is expected to rise further.³ As of March, 65 Malaysians are still trapped in Syria.⁴

Breeding New Narratives Online

Despite its military defeats and territorial losses, IS is ramping up its activities in cyberspace to ensure continued recruitment of volunteers for terrorist operations. In April 2019, IS released a video featuring its leader, Abu Bakar Baghdadi, after five years of

¹ Desmond Ng, "Islamic State Fighters Heading Home: Is Southeast Asia Ready?" *Channel News Asia*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/cnainsider/sis-fighters-heading-home-is-southeast-asia-ready-terror-threat-11750854>; Ryamizard Ryacudu, "The Need for Joint Counter-terrorism Frameworks in South-east Asia," *Today Online*, November 07, 2018, <https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/need-joint-counter-terrorism-frameworks-south-east-asia>.

² "13 Malaysians Who Joined Islamic State Want to Come Home," *New Straits Times*, March 12, 2019,

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/03/46855/8/13-malaysians-who-joined-islamic-state-want-come-home>.

³ "39 Malaysians Detained in Syria Want to Come Home." *Bernama*, March 19, 2019. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/05/48972/6/39-malaysians-detained-syria-want-come-home>.

⁴ Amy Chew, "Iran's Zarif to Trump: Drop 'Economic Terrorism' before Talks'." *Al Jazeera*, August 29, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/iran-zarif-trump-drop-economic-terrorism-talks-190829061054099.html>.

staying below the radar.⁵ In a bid to raise the deteriorating morale of IS fighters, supporters and sympathisers, Baghdadi asserted that the “battle today” is a battle of attrition. He urged IS fighters and supporters to drain their enemies’ resources and continue jihad until the Day of Judgement.⁶ He underscored that the will to wage the war is more important than winning it.⁷ Hence, it is critical for IS supporters to seek revenge and the most effective way is through armed violence. IS supporters in Malaysia are using this narrative to exploit local issues and grievances, adding a new dimension to the country’s threat landscape.

Target and Issues Exploited by pro-IS groups in Malaysia

Due to the new extremist narratives propagated by IS online, Malaysia’s threat landscape has subtly transformed. A key development is the efforts of pro-IS cells in Malaysia to exploit local issues like racial and religious tensions to launch attacks. Given the complexities of the country’s ethnic and religio-political landscape, Malaysia’s social fabric is becoming increasingly vulnerable and susceptible to racial and religious tensions.

Malaysian pro-IS supporters continue to rigorously spread its narrative and recruit members online. In May, a 42-year-old

contractor was arrested before his planned departure to Syria.⁸ He pledged allegiance to IS twice on Facebook and believed that Muslims who support and uphold democratic elections are infidels and thus permitted to be killed.⁹

IS “capitalises on the perception that Islam is under threat in Malaysia”.¹⁰ In this context, the determination of IS’ supporters in Malaysia has proven to be effective as on 13 May¹¹ this year, Malaysian authorities nabbed a pro-IS cell.¹² The cell comprised a Malaysian, two Rohingya Muslims and an Indonesian. It had planned a wave of large-scale terror attacks and assassinations to “avenge” the death of fireman Muhammad Adib Mohd Kassim.¹³

This plot was the first of its kind in which local grievances were exploited to inspire local and foreign militants to launch attacks in the country.¹⁴ The cell was planning to mount attacks on Christian, Hindu and Buddhist places of worship and entertainment venues at Klang Valley in Selangor state. The cell had also planned to kill high-profile personalities who they believed had insulted Islam or not shown sufficient support for the faith. It was busted between 5 and 7 May this year in Kuala Lumpur and Terengganu.¹⁵

Following the above-mentioned arrests, the Malaysian police are still searching for three

⁵ Hermesauto, “ISIS Releases First Videotape of Baghdadi in Five Years, US Vows to Track down Surviving Leaders of Militant Group,” *The Straits Times*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/islamic-state-media-group-airs-video-message-from-leader-al-baghdadi>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Emmanuel Santa Maria Chin, “Cops Nab Local Who Swore Allegiance to IS through Facebook, on the Way to Join Egyptian Cell,” *Malay Mail*, May 30, 2019, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/05/30/cops-nab-local-who-swore-allegiance-to-is-through-facebook-on-the-way-to-jo/1757859>.

¹⁰ “Islamic State Could Exploit Local Issues to Advance Ideology in Malaysia, Says Analyst,” *Malay Mail*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/05/14/islamic-state-could-exploit-local-issues-to-advance-ideology-in-malaysia-an/1752631>.

¹¹ Coincidence or otherwise, 13 May is a milestone in Malayan history as on this date in 1969, there was an outbreak of racial riots between Malays and Chinese in both Malaysia and Singapore.

¹² “Malaysia Foils Plot by 4 Men to ‘Avenge Fireman’s Death by Targeting VIPs, Houses of Worship,” *Asia One*, May 13, 2019, <https://www.asiaone.com/malaysia/malaysia-foils-plot-4-men-avenge-firemans-death-targeting-vips-houses-worship>.

¹³ Muhammad Adib was a fireman who died from injuries sustained during a riot at a Hindu temple in Subang Jaya on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur last year. The riot was said to have erupted over plans to relocate the temple. Adib’s death has become a rallying call for some Malaysian Muslims, including those in opposition political parties, who feel his death has not been addressed by the government.

¹⁴ Amy Chew, “Terror Plot by Islamic State ‘Wolf Pack’ in Malaysia Foiled, Police Say,” *South China Morning Post*, May 13, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3010061/islamic-state-wolf-pack-malaysia-planned-wave-terror>.

¹⁵ Ali Nufael and Hadi Azmi Hadi, “Rohingya among 4 Terror Suspects in Malaysian Custody,” *Benar News*, May 13, 2019, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/malaysian/t-error-arrests-05132019151005.html>.

more members of the cell, two Malaysians and one Indonesian, who remain at large.¹⁶ The involvement of foreigners, especially from Southeast Asia, in local issues signals greater collaboration between local and foreign militants. The trend of joint terrorist plots by local and foreign militants is likely continue in Malaysia, aided possibly by returning regional fighters looking to persist with their jihad.

Bomb Making Capabilities

Malaysian militants have improved their operational tactics and strategies as well. The recently arrested Malaysian militants have shown the ability to deploy chemicals in the process of constructing explosives. For instance, Malaysian authorities arrested two local militants, Muhammad Syazani Mahzan and Muhammad Nuurul Aiman Azizan, with bomb-making skills on 24 May who conducted tests on their home-made explosives.¹⁷ They used Triacetone Triperoxide (TATP) when putting together an explosive before testing it near their homes. As a highly impactful explosive, TATP has been commonly used by terrorists in Thailand and Indonesia. The most recent example of the use of TATP in the region was the coordinated Surabaya church bombings in Indonesia, in May 2018. Both militants were reported to have undergone bomb-making training by Indonesian IS-linked militant group, Jemaat Ansharul Daulah, in Yogyakarta in 2018.¹⁸

Malaysian radicals will likely persist with engaging in militancy on their home soil. IS' territorial defeat has not however whittled their desire to travel to Syria as seen by the ongoing attempts to physically join the terrorist group. This illustrates the continuing traction of IS ideology, which transcends territorial losses. While the threat of returning fighters seems critical and immediate, local authorities must continue to maintain a close watch over homegrown terrorists who continue to be influenced by IS jihadist ideology.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Arrested Malaysian Militants Tested Bombs in Kedah," *Asia One*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.asiaone.com/malaysia/arrested-malaysian-militants-tested-bombs-kedah>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Malaysia Arrests 3 Terror Suspects with Islamic State Links," *Channel News Asia*, May 30, 2019, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malays>

Deeper linkage with Foreign Militants

Malaysia has long been dealing with the issue of foreign radicals who have become more agile and use the country as a strategic bridge to reach the Philippines. According to the Royal Malaysian Police, more than 80 such suspected terrorists have been apprehended in Malaysia between May 2018 and May this year.¹⁹ A handful were foreigners who had links to overseas militant groups.

For instance, on 30 May this year, two foreigners with suspected links to IS were arrested. One was a 20-year-old Indonesian man who worked as a labourer in Sabah. He was arrested under the suspicion of facilitating suicide bombers from Indonesia who were travelling, through the porous borders of Sabah, to Southern Philippines.²⁰ Moreover, he was believed to have channeled funds to the Maute group in the Southern Philippines and had plans to fight in Syria. The Maute group is an IS-affiliated militant outfit which spearheaded the efforts to take over Marawi in 2017. Foreign militants are expanding their capabilities to provide financial and logistical support to strengthen IS' networks in Malaysia.

The other foreigner arrested was a 28-year-old Bangladeshi who was an expert in explosives and bomb-making. He was in possession of the necessary chemicals and know-how to assemble Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).²¹

Malaysian Response to Returning Fighters

In July 2018, Malaysia issued a conditional return offer to around 102 Malaysians who had left the country to join IS in Syria.²² This offer involved compliance with security checks, investigations, psychological examinations and counselling sessions with religious clerics to evaluate their level of radicalisation and psychological make-up.²³

[ia-arrests-3-terror-suspects-with-islamic-state-links-11581540](https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malaysia-arrests-3-terror-suspects-with-islamic-state-links-11581540).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Amy Chew, "Malaysia Offers Citizens Conditional Return as ISIL Crumbles," *Al Jazeera*, March 12, 2019,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/malaysia-offers-citizens-conditional-return-isil-crumbles-190312012544910.html>.

²³ Ibid.

Under the offer, all returnees will be interrogated but not all will be detained, subject to the outcome of investigations.²⁴ After preliminary investigations, those who did not participate in militant activities or criminal offences will undergo a one-month government-run rehabilitation program before they are re-integrated into society. Those found involved in criminal offences or militant activities will face court trials.²⁵

The process differs for women and children as these groups are largely assessed to have had no decision-making powers over their migration to Syria. Hence, their situation will be assessed on a case-to-case basis before the government decides on a suitable de-radicalisation process.

Hitherto, eleven Malaysian nationals have returned from Syria. Eight, all men, have been charged in court while the other three included one woman and two minor children. The woman has completed the rehabilitation program and returned to her village where she is being closely monitored.²⁶

The Malaysian authorities are currently working with the Syrian authorities to bring back a group of 39 Malaysians detained in Syria, who have expressed a desire to return home.²⁷ Around 65 Malaysians still remain in Syria, including 17 children, who are scattered across three locations in Syria.²⁸ As efforts continue to bring some of them home, others have chosen to remain in Syria or fight elsewhere instead of returning to Malaysia.

Those Malaysians who aspire to join IS but are unable to travel to Syria are now looking into going to Mindanao where militant groups have links to IS.²⁹ This is likely for two reasons. First, local Malaysian militants have strong ties with the Philippines' Abu Sayyaf

Group (ASG), an IS-linked faction based in Basilan, with some having direct connections to its leader, Furuji Indama. Members of ASG have recruited Malaysians to join the group. Furthermore, in 2017, the siege of Marawi by IS-affiliated militant groups alone witnessed the participation of about 30 Malaysian fighters who travelled to the conflict area.³⁰ Secondly, the close proximity between East Malaysia and southern Philippines provides a convenient opportunity for returning Malaysian militants to continue their 'jihad' in the region. Sabah's porous borders have been exploited numerous times by militants to travel between the two countries.

Policy considerations

There are several key concerns that require greater policy attention in dealing with the current threat landscape in Malaysia. First, Malaysian authorities should periodically review the efficacy of their one-month rehabilitation policy. For battle-hardened returnees, a one-month de-radicalisation programme is unlikely to be sufficient in reality. A more extensive and rigorous de-radicalisation policy initiative would be needed to ensure the returnees' successful and effective rehabilitation and reintegration into society. In this regard, it is also useful to draw lessons from other countries that have similar policies which have been effective.

Secondly, the government should consider calibrating their rehabilitation strategies according to the different profiles of returnees. For instance, returning children who have been exposed to daily violence in Syria would require a customised de-radicalisation programme. This customised intervention is critical to address issues like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and disengagement from violence which could impede their

²⁴ Victor Merrick, "Malaysia Offers Olive Branch to IS Returnees," *Ucanews.com*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/malaysia-offers-olive-branch-to-is-returnees/84733>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "39 Malaysians Detained in Syria Want to Come Home," *New Straits Times*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/05/48972/6/39-malaysians-detained-syria-want-come-home>.

²⁸ Amy Chew, "Malaysian Members of Islamic State Flee Crumbling Caliphate in Syria," *South China Morning Post*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/week->

[asia/people/article/3001734/malaysian-mother-who-went-syria-join-islamic-state-now-wants-come](https://www.scmp.com/week-).

²⁹ "Malaysia Taking Back Jihadists from Syria with Caution," *Asia News*, March 15, 2019, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Malaysia-taking-back-jihadists-from-Syria-with-caution-46512.html>.

³⁰ Farlina Said, "Terrorism Threat Requires Community-Based Solutions in Malaysia," *South China Morning Post*, May 15, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/week->
[asia/opinion/article/3009291/malaysias-terrorism-threat-must-be-addressed-community-level](https://www.scmp.com/week-).

psychological and attitudinal development, critical to their long-term reintegration into society.

Finally, amidst the increasingly polarised ethnic and religio-political climate in Malaysia, the new Pakatan Harapan government should carefully manage issues centering on race and religion. Racial and religious issues, especially those which can be exploited to suggest Islam is under threat in Malaysia, can be scavenged by IS to keep its radical ideology alive among potential extremists in the country.

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Philippines' Foreign Fighter Phenomenon

Kenneth Yeo Yaoren

Synopsis

Following the Islamic State (IS)'s loss of territory in Syria, foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) are expected to return to their countries of origin or shift to other conflict theatres in preparation for IS' self-declared long war campaign. The Philippines, as the epicentre of IS' East Asia wilayah, could be a major focal point for FTFs. Government agencies should prepare for the consolidation of rebel forces in hotspots such as Mindanao, with IS affiliate groups seeking to complement local fighters with FTFs and even child militants as part of a campaign to gain territory.

Overview

Following the collapse of its self-proclaimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State (IS) is down but far from defeated. The movement has spread elsewhere, with scores of the estimated 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) based in Syria relocating to other conflict theatres.¹ Two years on from the Marawi siege, which saw the Mindanao city overrun by IS fighters and a *wilayah* (province) declared, the Philippines could see an influx of FTFs seeking safe haven in the jungles and remote villages in the area, which has a long history of lawlessness, clan rivalry and separatist and Islamist rebellions.

Such a consolidation of FTFs and local terrorist fighters in the southern Philippines is

¹ The "long war" or the "war of attrition" is a narrative propagated by IS that began sometime in 2016 and amplified shortly prior to and after the fall of Baghouz. It is reinforced in a IS video released in April 2019, in which IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi proclaimed that the group is engaging in a war of attrition against Western forces, demonstrated in the small-scale attacks, ambushes, bombings, raids, assassinations and other insurgency tactics carried out by IS fighters in Syria, Iraq and other conflict

of mounting concern to security agencies as IS could, through offers of funding and propagation of radical rhetoric, seek to supplement its forces by recruiting disenfranchised Muslim youth. In this regard, the involvement of Filipino national Norman Lasuca, in the June 28 suicide attack in Sulu province is potentially significant. Reports have identified Lasuca, 23, as the first known local operative involved in a suicide attack in the country.² With the added impetus of a leadership transition within the IS' Philippines network, the Filipino authorities will have to adopt comprehensive counter-terrorism measures to address these developments, which also have regional implications.

Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Philippines

The FTF phenomenon in the Philippines is not new. In 1999, the Rabitatul Mujahideen – a regional Islamist militancy coalition initiated by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) – was formed to establish an Islamist militancy network in Southeast Asia. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from the Philippines was reported to be involved in this network.³ The MILF is believed to have shared training facilities with regional terrorist groups such as JI, and the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM), while also facilitating Indonesian

theatres the group has claimed to operate in or is affiliated to via links to local Islamist groups.

² JC Gotinga, 'AFP, PNP: Filipino Suicide Bomber behind Sulu Attack', *Rappler*, 10 July 2019, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/235077-afp-pnp-say-filipino-suicide-bomber-behind-sulu-attack>.

³ Justin V. Hastings, *'No Man's Land: Globalization, Territory, and Clandestine Groups in Southeast Asia'*, National University Press, 2011.

extremist groups in the procurement of weapons from the Philippines.⁴

The Philippines has long seen an influx of FTFs from its regional neighbours, including Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. According to reports from 2014, Malaysian nationals, affiliated to a regional IS network led by Dr Mahmud Ahmad, were believed to have facilitated the smuggling of several of their fellow nationals into the Philippines in 2014.⁵ Additionally, notorious Malaysian bombmakers such as Dr Azahari bin Husin⁶, Zulkifli Abdir aka Marwan⁷ and Amin Baco⁸ were also said to have spent a significant amount of time in the Philippines. Further, a report by the Institute for Policy Analysis for Conflict (IPAC) identified 21 Indonesian FTFs killed or arrested in the Philippines between 2016 and 2017.⁹ Singaporean terrorists Muhamad Ali Abdul Rahiman aka Muawiyah¹⁰ and Abu Hud Zain¹¹ also fought and were eventually killed in the Philippines.

In today's context, IS' weakened presence in the Iraq-Syria theatre has positioned the Philippines as an attractive destination for FTFs in Southeast Asia given its status as an alternate conflict theatre within jihadists' discourse. Armed with extensive conflict experience, FTFs are known to train local fighters, provide funds as well as access to a global support network. They also play a crucial role in overcoming parochial divisions among Filipino groups. These factors, combined with burgeoning local allegiance to

pro-IS groups in Mindanao, represent a potent security threat going forward, law enforcement officials say.

The influx of non-regional FTFs is another concern. This was apparent during the Marawi siege in 2017, when following a brutal five-month long armed conflict, the Armed Forces of Philippines (AFP) identified several non-regional FTFs - from the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Europe - among the deceased fighters.¹² Reports have since emerged this year of nationals from these regions continuing to attempt entry into the country, purportedly with the intention of joining IS affiliated local groups.¹³ On July 15, government forces captured two Pakistani nationals, Salid Ali and Rahim Zada, aged 28 and 42 respectively, over their suspected links to IS.¹⁴

The strategy of recruiting of FTFs indicates a deliberate effort by threat groups operating in the Philippines to maintain an ability to execute suicide bomb attacks. Until recently, local terrorists have avoided suicide bombings because Filipino Muslim tribes, such as the Tausug, Maranao, and Maguindanao tribes, pride themselves as warriors and prefer sustained combat over conducting suicide attacks, which is viewed as a cowardly tactic. The threat landscape changed, however, following the Lamitan suicide attack in July last year, when a van carrying explosives blew up, killing the alleged Moroccan perpetrator and ten others. IS' affiliate in Sulu

⁴ Preeti Bhattacharji, 'Terrorism Havens: Philippines', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 1 June 2009, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/terrorism-havens-philippines>.

⁵ 'Malaysian Terror Trio Went to Philippines in 2014', *The Star Online*, 1 October 2017, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/10/01/malaysian-terror-trio-went-to-philippines-in-2014/>

⁶ 'Dr Azahari the Most Dangerous Terrorist', *The Star Online*, 15 August 2003, <https://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/letters/2003/08/15/dr-azahari-the-most-dangerous-terrorist/>

⁷ 'Killing Marwan in Mindanao', *Institute for Policy Analysis for Conflict*, no. 17 (5 March 2015).

⁸ Jasinder Singh, 'ISIS' Amin Baco: Tri-Border Emir in Southeast Asia', *RSIS Commentary*, 23 November 2017.

⁹ 'Marawi the "East Asia Wilayah" and Indonesia', *Institute for Policy Analysis for Conflict*, no. 38 (21 July 2017).

¹⁰ 'Singaporean Man Involved in Southern Philippines Terror Activities: MHA', *TODAYonline*, 26 May 2017, <https://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/singaporean>

[s-among-foreign-militants-fighting-philippine-army-marawi](https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/mindanao-blast-payback-for-killing-of-militants)

¹¹ Raul Dancel, 'Mindanao Blast Payback for Killing of Militants?', *The Straits Times*, 5 January 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/mindanao-blast-payback-for-killing-of-militants>

¹² Zam Yusa, 'Philippines: 100 Foreign Fighters Joined ISIS in Mindanao since the Marawi Battle', *The Defense Post*, 5 November 2018, <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/11/05/100-foreign-fighters-join-isis-mindanao-philippines-marawi/>

¹³ Robert Postings, 'The Philippines: Destination for ISIS Foreign Fighters from Europe and Beyond?', *The Defense Post*, 12 September 2018, <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/09/12/philippines-isis-foreign-fighters-europe/>

¹⁴ BenarNews, 'Philippines: Captured Two Pakistanis, Probe Possible Islamic State Link', *Eurasia Review* (blog), 15 July 2019, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/15072019-philippines-captured-two-pakistanis-probe-possible-islamic-state-link/>

subsequently recruited two Indonesians to conduct the Jolo Church suicide bombing in January this year. The apparent lethality and attention garnered by the two suicide attacks proved that suicide tactics are arguably more effective than other methods previously employed by local groups. The recruitment of foreign suicide bombers for similar attacks also allows groups to retain trained local fighters for armed combat, while still executing high casualty attacks on soft targets.¹⁵

Recruitment of Youth Militants

Besides FTFs, terrorists in the Philippines appear to be recruiting youths to supplement their forces. The recruitment of Lasuca mirrors a trend seen in conflict theatres around the world, where IS and other militant groups recruit youths to rebuild ranks depleted by losses, preserve adult fighters or simply to catch security forces off-guard. As terrorism in the Philippines depends on guerrilla tactics, untrained child soldiers can also be effective operatives.¹⁶

Although conventional literature has emphasised that economic benefits or physical punishment is needed to recruit and retain child soldiers,¹⁷ in the Philippines, child militants appear to be recruited through ties of kinship or ideological indoctrination within a religious setting. Based on checks on their social media activity, IS affiliated groups in the Philippines have used *pengajian* (Islamic study sessions) to indoctrinate and recruit youth. In Indonesia, this method has been used by JI to radicalise children from rural villages.¹⁸ It is a structured, yet flexible indoctrination programme conducted within small study groups that can run between 18 months to five years.¹⁹ Such programmes leverage on the appeal of Islamic studies to

systematically isolate children from their community. Some children may subsequently be radicalised and become militants.

IS affiliated groups in the Philippines appear to have used a variation of this programme to radicalise a number of youths, and have taken to publicising their recruitment of children on social media. For example, individuals claiming to be youth affiliated to IS have in recent months shared their experience of *pengajian* on Facebook. Images shared on their Facebook pages appear to show youths of varied ages huddled into make-shift study groups within forested areas.

Terrorist groups also exploit family networks to recruit child soldiers. The Ajang Ajang Group, which comprises the sons of deceased Abu Sayyaf members, and currently under the command of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, is known to conduct kidnappings, piracy, and smuggling activities for the IS' affiliate in Sulu.²⁰

From a counter-terrorism perspective, youth militancy poses a particular challenge, given that youths are relatively easier to indoctrinate.²¹ They can also be taught to be loyal to an organisation through various methods of socialisation.²² Furthermore, the inculcation of militancy at a young age hardens their worldview, which can make it harder to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society later in life.²³

Leadership Dynamics

In the Mindanao region, the leaders of threat groups have facilitated various strategies undertaken in recent times. While there were no explicit claims to the leadership of IS in the Philippines after the passing of Isnilon

¹⁵ Kenneth Yeo, 'The Changing Dynamics of Islamist Terrorism in Philippines', *The Diplomat*, 28 February 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/the-changing-dynamics-of-islamist-terrorism-in-philippines/>

¹⁶ Scott Gates, 'Why Do Children Fight? Motivations and the Mode of Recruitment', in *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (Springer, 2011), 29–49.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten E. Schulze, 'Why They Join: Pathways into Indonesian Jihadist Organizations', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 6 July 2018, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1481309>

¹⁹ Nasir Abas, *Membongkar Jamaah Islamiyah: Pengakuan Mantan Ketua JI* (Abdika Press, 2009), p. 99.

²⁰ Kenneth Yeo, 'The Changing Dynamics of Islamist Terrorism in Philippines', *The Diplomat*, 28 February 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/the-changing-dynamics-of-islamist-terrorism-in-philippines/>

²¹ Kalsoom Lakhani, 'Indoctrinating Children: The Making of Pakistan's Suicide Bombers', *CTC Sentinel* Vol. 3 (6), June 2010.

²² Lotte Vermeij, 'Children of Rebellion: Socialization of Child Soldiers within the Lord's Resistance Army' *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, October 2009.

²³ Ibid

Hapilon, the previous emir of IS in the region, several potential successors have been mooted in the past two years.²⁴

Authorities initially identified Abu Dar, then leader of the Maute Group/IS-Lanao, as the most probable replacement for Hapilon as *emir* or leader of IS in the Philippines. Abu Dar's leadership previously appeared crucial for IS networks operating in Mindanao. Having survived the Marawi siege, he attained first-hand experience in battling the AFP as one of the leaders of IS' Philippines coalition. He also proved to be resourceful, allegedly looting large sums of money from destroyed properties during the Marawi siege²⁵ and further raising funds to recruit and train militants through drug trafficking.²⁶

The AFP's subsequent hunt for Abu Dar drove him into hiding, rendering him unable to coordinate efforts for much of the past two years. Nevertheless, he managed to evade the authorities until March this year when he was killed in an artillery strike. Since his body was damaged and beyond recognition, the Filipino authorities could only confirm his death a month later using DNA verification.²⁷ His passing marked the death of the last leader known to have participated in the Marawi siege.

The 60-year-old Sawadjaan, who leads IS-Sulu, came to public prominence following the Jolo Church bombing in January this year.

²⁴ Carmela Fonbuena, 'AFP Lists 5 People Who Could Be next ISIS Emir in SE Asia', *Rappler*, 17 January 2018, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/193870-ph-military-isis-emir-southeast-asia-successor>; Manuel Mogato, 'Philippines Hunts for Possible New Islamic State "emir" in South...', *Reuters*, 6 November 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-militants-idUSKBN1D60L9>; Amy Chew, 'Notorious Abu Sayyaf Sub-Commander Touted as Future Emir of Islamic State in Southeast Asia - Channel NewsAsia', *Channel NewsAsia*, 17 October 2017, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/abu-sayyaf-future-emir-islamic-state-southeast-asia-9318990>

²⁵ 'Philippines: Thousands Flee as Army Hits ISIL-Linked Maute Group', *Al Jazeera*, 20 June 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/philippines-thousands-flee-army-hits-isil-linked-maute-group-180620065038477.html>

²⁶ Amy Chew, 'Drug Trade in Southern Philippines Still Bankrolling Pro-Islamic State Militants: Analyst', *Channel NewsAsia*, 1 August 2018, [https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/drug-](https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/drug-trade-southern-philippines-1808010065038477.html)

The two-phase suicide attack was allegedly mounted by Indonesian fighters recruited by Sawadjaan, and who were smuggled through the Sulu Archipelago.²⁸ Sawadjaan appears to have superseded other faction leaders also linked to high-profile terrorist attacks in the country. These include Furuji Indama and Turaifie, leaders of IS-Basilan and the Jamaah Mohajirin Wal Ansar (JMA) faction of BIFF respectively, who are believed to have coordinated the high profile Lamitan bombing²⁹ last July and the New Year's Eve bombing of a mall³⁰ last year in Cotabato city. What differentiates him from others is Sawadjaan's control over the strategically important Sulu Archipelago, which allows IS-Sulu to dictate the flow of foreign fighters into Mindanao.

Sawadjaan's leadership can therefore significantly influence the future strategic shift of IS-affiliated groups to recruit foreigners as suicide bombers.³¹ Taken together, these factors make him a more viable leader for IS in the Philippines.

The Sulu Archipelago – The Gateway to Terror in Mindanao

The Sulu Archipelago is arguably one of the hotbeds of terrorist activities in the region today. Sulu was previously used as the main gateway from East Sabah into Mindanao by

[trade-marawi-mindanao-philippines-islamic-state-maute-10574894](http://www.rappler.com/nation/193870-ph-military-isis-emir-southeast-asia-successor)

²⁷ Carmela Fonbuena, 'Leader of Isis in Philippines Killed, DNA Tests Confirm', *The Guardian*, 14 April 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/14/leader-of-isis-in-philippines-killed-dna-tests-confirm>

²⁸ 'At Least 21 Dead, 71 Wounded in Jolo, Sulu Church Explosions — PNP Chief', *CNN Philippines*, 27 January 2019, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/01/27/jolo-town-cathedral-explosion.html>

²⁹ Ferdinandh Cabrera, 'Van Explosion Kills 10 at Basilan Checkpoint', *GMA News Online*, 31 July 2018, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/regions/662411/car-bomb-kills-6-in-basilan-checkpoint/story/>

³⁰ Edwin Fernandez and Noel Punzalan, 'Army Eyes BIFF in New Year's Eve Mall Bombing', *Philippine News Agency*, 1 January 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1057781>

³¹ Kenneth Yeo, 'The Changing Dynamics of Islamist Terrorism in Philippines', *The Diplomat*, 28 February 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/the-changing-dynamics-of-islamist-terrorism-in-philippines/>

FTFs during the Marawi siege.³² The Moroccan bomber involved in the Lamitan attack, Abu Khatir Al-Maghribi, as well as the two Indonesian nationals, Rullie Rian Zeke and Ulfah Handayani Saleh, linked to the Jolo church bombing³³, were also believed to have travelled through the Sulu Archipelago by leveraging Sawadjaan's networks. Given his control over a vital travel route, Sawadjaan is poised to regulate the flow of transnational resources into Mindanao.

While enforcement in the area has long been a focus for the authorities, the terrain, which includes the long coastlines of East Sabah and scattered islands of the Sulu Archipelago, is almost impossible to effectively patrol. Furthermore, the tendency for militants to operate at night, often utilising custom-made pump boats, has allowed them to escape detection by satellites and coast guards patrolling the waters.³⁴ The sheer vastness of the archipelago has also spread the resources of the AFP and Philippine National Police (PNP) thin, exposing them to ambushes and harassment. These factors have contributed in part to the persistence of militancy in the territory.

According to experts, safe havens are force multipliers for terrorist groups as they facilitate recruitment. Such havens also provide terrorists the space to establish command and control operations, training facilities, logistics and communication networks, and conduct fundraising activities.³⁵ In Sulu, the IS affiliate's recruitment of child militants through *pengajian* has leveraged the safe spaces to conduct such closed Islamic study groups. Given the control the group enjoys over the

area, it is adequately positioned to recruit and train more child militants going forward.

The strategic position of the Sulu Archipelago also provides terrorists with alternative ways to fund their activities. For example, easy access to the sea, exacerbated by weak port security, has meant terrorists often double up as kidnappers, pirates and smugglers. The Sulu Sea is notorious for rampant kidnap-for-ransom activities conducted by various militant groups. While it is unclear whether the criminally inclined Radullan Sahiron faction of the Abu Sayyaf Group or Sawadjaan's IS Sulu faction is behind these kidnappings, it is likely that Sawadjaan's control over the territory grants him greater scope to utilise such fundraising tactics.

Government Response

The Philippines needs a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy that addresses several looming threats in the country and the wider region. For one, the government needs to intensify collaboration with its neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia, to tighten border security to combat illicit activities such as human smuggling across the Sulu-Celebes Seas through mechanisms such as the Trilateral Cooperative Agreement (TCA)³⁶ and possible joint ground exercises to sieve out terrorists' sanctuaries.³⁷ Additionally, countries in the region must improve intelligence sharing through various bilateral and multilateral arrangements, and also combat the flow of terrorist financing.³⁸

In response to growing militant activity in the Sulu islands, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte deployed the new 11th Infantry

³² Zam Yusa, 'Malaysia and Indonesia Foreign Fighter Transit Routes to Philippines Identified', *The Defense Post*, 20 November 2018,

<https://thedefensepost.com/2018/11/20/malaysia-indonesia-philippines-foreign-fighters-transit-routes/>

³³ 'Indonesian Couple with Ties to JAD behind Jolo Church Attack: Police', *The Jakarta Post*, 24 July 2019,

<https://www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2019/07/24/indonesian-couple-with-ties-to-jad-behind-jolo-church-attack-police.html>

³⁴ 'Annual Threat Assessment 2019', *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 11, January 2019,

https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CTTA_Annual_2019-1.pdf

³⁵ Cristiana C. Brafman Kittner, 'The Role of Safe Havens in Islamist Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19 (2007): 307–29.

³⁶ Prashanth Parameswaran, 'Malaysia Spotlights Expanded Sulu Sea Trilateral Patrols', *The Diplomat*, 19 April 2018,

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/malaysia-spotlights-expanded-sulu-sea-trilateral-patrols/>

³⁷ Rini Utami and Libertina W Ambari, 'Indonesia Proposes Joint Exercise to Fight Terrorism', *Antara News*, 14 September 2018,

<https://en.antaranews.com/news/118558/indonesia-proposes-joint-exercise-to-fight-terrorism>

³⁸ Prashanth Parameswaran, 'Where Is the New ASEAN "Our Eyes" Intelligence Initiative Headed?', *The Diplomat*, 5 February 2019,

<https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/where-is-the-new-asean-our-eyes-intelligence-initiative-headed/>

Division based in Zamboanga on 18 December 2018 to the region.³⁹ The division will be part of the Joint Task Force Sulu (JTFS) tasked with eradicating IS operatives from the area. On 3 June 2019, a further 1700 soldiers were deployed to Sulu to supplement the JTFS.⁴⁰ Such enforcement tactics have had some effect - approximately 20 members from IS-Sulu, 19 members from BIFF, and 11 members from IS-Lanao are reported to have surrendered to the authorities this year.⁴¹ However, the government needs to go further, by investing in rehabilitation programmes to reintegrate former combatants into society.

Some noteworthy initiatives currently in place include one by the government of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).⁴² It has a 10 month long rehabilitation programme hosted in Basilan, that provides captured militants with free education, housing, healthcare and social welfare to expedite their reintegration into mainstream society.⁴³ Non-government organisations in the area also play an active role. The Philippines Centre of Islam and Democracy, for example, has partnered with madrasas (religious schools) to educate students on moderate aspects of Islam.⁴⁴ Such programmes should be expanded and rolled out across other affected provinces around the country.

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³⁹ Roel Pareño, 'New Infantry Division to Help Beat Abu Sayyaf in Sulu', *Philstar.Com*, 18 December 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2018/12/18/1878057/new-infantry-division-help-beat-abu-sayyaf-sulu>

⁴⁰ Michael Punongbayan, 'More Soldiers Deployed vs Abus', *Philstar Global*, 3 June 2019, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2019/06/03/1923113/more-soldiers-deployed-vs-abus>

⁴¹ Compiled from various sources.

⁴² Roel Pareño, 'Ex-Abu Sayyaf Finish DepEd's ALS Program', *Philstar Global*, 13 July 2019, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2019/07/13/1934212>

[/ex-abu-sayyaf-finish-depeds-als-program](#); Julie S. Alipala, 'From Clashes to Classes: Former Abu Sayyaf Bandits Earn Diplomas', *Inquirer News*, 13 July 2019, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1141240/from-clashes-to-classes-former-abu-sayyaf-bandits-earn-diplomas>

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Amina Rasul-Bernardo, 'Amina Rasul-Bernardo - President of the Philippine Centre for Islam and Democracy', A Conversation," *Channel News Asia*, 5 March 2018, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/podcasts/conversation-with/amina-rasul-bernardo-10014512>

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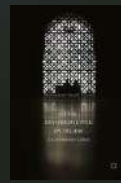
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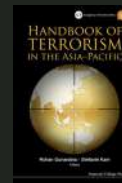
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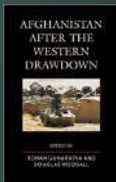
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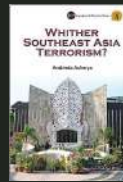
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