

ISIL Radicalization, Recruitment, and Social Media Operations in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines

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In a 2014 video posted to YouTube, the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) announced the end of Sykes-Picot.¹ While Sykes-Picot may be unfamiliar among many in the West, ISIL's appeal in 2014 centered on promoting its ability and vision, as a caliphate, to invalidate the boundary between Iraq and Syria. That border, a result of World War I neocolonial competition, stemmed from the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement that divided the region into mandates governed by and reflecting the interests of France and Britain. Where was the Wahhabbi doctrine in this YouTube message? Nowhere. Rather, the message suggested that administrative control of territory, an opportunity provided by the Syrian Civil War, distinguished ISIL from other terrorist organizations and that expansion of a caliphate did not rely on the legitimacy of radical Wahhabism ideology alone. While ideology remains central to this process, ISIL radicalization depends on exploitation of networks including familial ties, friendship, religious institutions and especially expansion of these connections. With the potential end of its attempted caliphate in Iraq and Syria, what other regional networks will ISIL target for exploitation?

As ISIL diminishes in Iraq and Syria, the organization seeks to survive by exploiting radicalized networks elsewhere, especially in Southeast Asia. To assess this ongoing development, the task and purpose of this article is to examine ISIL-oriented radicalization and recruitment in Southeast Asia. First, this process is assessed in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines with attention to specific groups as national or, where applicable, transnational entities. Second, the paper addresses how ISIL-related radicalization incorporates social media

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operations in Southeast Asia and how the use of encrypted communication apps support those efforts.

Southeast Asian terrorist groups' self-proclaimed ties with ISIL grew in 2015 and 2016. This article asserts that these connections may expand as ISIL's base in Iraq and Syria decreases. Indeed, many Southeast Asia-based organizations sought Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's acknowledgement of their allegiance to the Iraq and Syrian-based "Islamic Caliphate" at its zenith in 2014 and 2015. However, during its primary period of expansion in 2015, ISIL did not recognize Indonesia, for example, as a territory or as a sponsored province known as *wilayaht*.² Despite this, Indonesian affiliates still sought ISIL acknowledgment by providing recruits to ISIL with the intent of potentially extending the caliphate to Southeast Asia.

ISIL leadership in Syria and Iraq failed to confirm Southeast Asian terrorist groups' allegiance to ISIL in a manner similar to the ISIL enfranchisement provided to Boko Haram and al-Shabaab in Nigeria and Somalia. Why? ISIL's apparent focus on recruitment prioritized replacing its dwindling supply of personnel in the conflict contesting the Assad regime in Syria instead of viably extending its caliphate to Southeast Asia. One reason, with the current exception of Mindanao in the Philippines, includes lack of popular support for ISIL despite pockets of radicalized populations in Southeast Asia. Indeed, it is difficult to argue that a wide-range of the populace, in any Southeast Asian country, supports radical Wahhabist interpretations of Islam let alone ISIL demagoguery. Historically, only the Darul Islam movement and rebellion, which took place in West Java from 1949–62,

received sustained public support. Still, ISIL's proven use of radicalized individuals and small groups demonstrates that networks in Southeast Asia remain viable threats to partners in the region. This is particularly true with the provision of specialized training to regional networks, groups, and individuals.

Groups such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) continue to operate in the Philippines and Indonesia, but their prestige among radical Islamic supporters is diminishing. However, the ebb and flow of group viability may depend on what happens to ISIL in places such as Mosul and Raqqa, Iraq. Although ISIL is in a position of weakness this year, as compared to 2014 and 2015, it still poses a serious challenge because of its ability to franchise its ideology and encourage attacks, such as those that took place in Nice and Paris, France; Istanbul, Turkey; and most recently in London and Manchester, England.

ISIL remains a threat because of its ability to metastasize in other countries, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, in addition to its ability to support isolated attacks in Western Europe. While a formal caliphate does not currently exist in Southeast Asia, efforts to extend its reach through proxy organizations persist. In a sense, ISIL presents a hydraulic-like capability: as it is compressed by anti-ISIL forces in Iraq and Syria, it goes to those areas where opportunity exists. In the West, access to end-to-end encrypted communications apps, such as Telegram Messenger and WhatsApp, enable these transitions to other locations and the ability to plan and execute operations.³ In the case of Southeast Asia, space and material support provided by

organizations such as ASG and others who assimilate ISIL ideology through local conditioning also help ISIL maintain existence and pose a potential security threat.

Security concerns presented by ISIL-influenced radicalized groups include attempts to dismantle, or weaken, governments in Malaysia and Indonesia, and to establish an Islamic State along the lines sought by historical precedents in the region such as Darul Islam. The potential threat of ISIL-influenced radicalization is challenging in Southeast Asia because of the vast populations' diversity in the region, a lack of regional consensus regarding unified security countermeasures, and ISIL's ability to incorporate tried technologies, such as mobile messaging applications, especially Telegram Messenger, to facilitate recruitment and radicalization among possible adherents.

An additional concern for Southeast Asian governments is Iraq- and Syria-based ISIL veteran returnees to Southeast Asia, should they survive operations in Syria and Iraq. Historical precedents for this phenomenon occurred when former members of the Afghan Mujahideen returned to Southeast Asia to establish JI in Indonesia and the ASG in the Philippines.⁴ Clearly, the region remains a viable region for terrorist recruitment, especially among Indonesian, Malaysian, and Philippine nationals.⁵

Indonesia

When Indonesia achieved independence in 1949, it confronted "guerrilla war, communist revolt, political extremism combined with religious fanaticism, and separatist movements in some of the various island territories that made up the new republic."⁶ Guerrilla war and communist revolt passed,

but the latter problem of political extremism remains, and religious fanaticism remains problematic. However, while Muslims constitute 87.8 percent of Indonesia's population, the Indonesian public's perception of ISIL is overwhelmingly negative. According to a December 2015 survey conducted by the Kompas Media Group, 0.3 percent of respondents supported establishment of ISIS in Indonesia and only 0.8 percent indicated even general support for ISIL.⁷

Despite this lack of support, as of March 2016, Indonesian Government authorities and media reporting indicated that from 250–1,000 ISIL members existed in Indonesia, while the U.S. Department of State *Country Report for Terrorism in Indonesia* estimated 800 Indonesian foreign terrorist fighters operating in Iraq and Syria.⁸ Due to these relatively low numbers in terms of Indonesia's massive Muslim population, the Indonesian Government is successful in managing its civil society organizations, and for non-interference with the large majority of Muslim organizations which condemn ISIL. However, while there were stronger counterterrorism and antiterrorism laws pending in the Indonesian legislature as of mid-2016, current counterterrorism laws remain weak. Notably, laws criminalizing travel to join terrorist organizations and providing material support to terrorists remain uncoded in Indonesian law as of mid-2016.⁹

Even as early as 2014, Indonesian counterterrorism experts stated that ISIL recruitment occurred in 16 Indonesian provinces, with Aceh as a central region for recruitment.¹⁰ Where radicalization has been successful, the prison system and propaganda

distribution through social media, specifically YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, were force multipliers for radicalized members. Radicalization within prisoner networks, not surprisingly, relies on visitor access to convicts and those visitors' dissemination of messages on behalf of inmates. Abu Bakir Bashir, the spiritual head of JI and leader of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, for instance, was visited by an estimated nine hundred individuals during 2015. Despite publicly pledging his allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in August 2014, Bashir "was allowed to receive visitors and often gave lectures which were recorded and presumably passed outside."¹¹

As of February 2016, however, terrorists such as Bashir and Aman Abdurrahman were moved from Kembang Kuning prison to Pasir Putih prison and were confined to isolation.¹² Abdurrahman is particularly important because his organization, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) disseminated ISIL propaganda and conducts ISIL recruitment under his direction even though he remains incarcerated. This is notable because JAD messaging was also disseminated to violent extremist groups that splintered from JAD including the Eastern Indonesia Mujahid (MIT) and Western Indonesia Mujahidin (MIB). As a source of information operations on ISIL's behalf, radicalization within the prison system indicates that prison reform deserves serious consideration as an important security challenge in Indonesia.¹³

Prisons, particularly those founded by administrations during the colonial era, historically provide primary sites for radicalization and recruitment. This occurred in past cases ranging from incarceration of communists and nationalists in Vietnam, to

radicalized religious adherents in Indonesia.¹⁴ Current ISIL leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, infamously, was incarcerated and further radicalized during Operation *Iraqi Freedom*. The phenomenon of prison-based radicalization presents, therefore, a problematic and long-standing legacy. In the case of French operations in Algeria in 1958, for example, American historian and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University's Institute of Advanced Study, Peter Paret noted that internment of Front Liberation National (FLN) members in Algeria typified this problem. In describing prison camps, Paret observed:

*Many camps lacked funds to institute sufficient work and study programs, so that the men had too much time to themselves. All this was conducive to the establishment of FLN networks in the camps, and even if an inmate could evade rebel control there, he would find it difficult to escape the power of the parallel hierarchies once he had been released.*¹⁵

Current literature on prison-based radicalization cites numerous prisons, such as those on the Indonesian island of Nusakambangan on Java, where potential ISIL recruits are detained. This is problematic because, as the U.S. Department of State *Country Report on Terrorism in Indonesia* claims, Indonesia's most hardened terrorists and ideologues are also incarcerated on the island.¹⁶ Radicalized and potentially radicalized inmates are co-located and inmates form a foundation of networked relationships when released. Not surprisingly, Nusakambangan and potentially all prisons offer ripe opportunities for radicalization.

Laws guiding prosecution of potential ISIL adherents are also insufficient and problematic. In one case, which demonstrated a critical loophole after successful arrests by Indonesian authorities, thirty eight suspected militants were released within twenty four hours because authorities cannot arrest individuals based only on detection of a radical network. This is problematic, particularly since those released possessed weapons, ISIL flags, and training materials but had not yet committed a crime or, in ISIL's terms, an operation.¹⁷

The Waiheru Detention Center in Ambon, Indonesia demonstrates a more recent case and is similar to the radicalization process Peter Paret described in 1958 in Algeria. The Center was known as a planning site for an attack on a Christian village, named Loki, which occurred in May 2005. This attack was carried out by KOMPAK, an Indonesian acronym for the Crisis Action Committee, a "charity" set up by the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council. An individual incarcerated in the facility named Abu Gar led proselytizing discussions with inmates and communicated with the known radical jihadist, Aman Abdurrahman. According to an Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict report published in 2016, these inmates "also held religious study sessions (*pengajian*) once a week after dawn prayers via handphones with Aman Abdurrahman, himself in prison outside Jakarta. All the extremist inmates attended."¹⁸ The implications for ISIL to graft itself onto established, already radicalized networks, even those incarcerated, is clear for potential ISIL-based expansion in the region.

Majmuah al-Arkhabiliy—Katibah Nusantara

Among the most pivotal indicators of ISIL-related radicalization in Indonesia is the development of Majmuah al-Arkhabiliy (MA), formerly known as Katibah Nusantara. This group is ISIL's Malay Archipelago combat unit based in al-Shadid in the Syrian province of Hasaka.¹⁹ Established in September 2014, the organization developed to meet the needs of Malay-speakers fighting in Iraq and Syria. Its name attempts to evoke a pan-Malay concept of nationalism and the organization seeks to complete recruitment, training, and propaganda-related tasks on behalf of ISIL, and it attempts to connect with established local terror groups.

A key task of Kantibah Nusantara consists of supporting ISIL's administration of an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and serving as a potential "forerunner for ISIL's extension into Southeast Asia." In this regard, however, this phenomenon differs from the historical case of former Malaysian/Indonesian Mujahidin returning from Afghanistan in the 1980s. Those returnees, known as the "Afghan Alumni," formed a core node within JI. As suggested earlier, ISIL supporters who return to Southeast Asia would likely return due only to defeat in Syria and Iraq. Survival of ISIL members, particularly in light of ongoing military action targeting ISIL members in Syria and Iraq, makes the "returnee" thesis, however, difficult to sustain and it is more likely that many go to Syria and Iraq with no intention to return to their points of origin.

Katibah Nusantara's physical presence in Malaysia or Indonesia is not verified but the possible establishment of this organization within Southeast Asia is important to

anticipate. Jasminder Singh, an analyst at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, pointed this group out after they successfully captured five anti-ISIL, Kurdish-held locations in Syria which then formed the basis for a propaganda effort among Indonesian and Malay language social media sites.²⁰ Importantly, Katibah Nusantara also translates ISIL material from Arabic into Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia, and works with the Islamic State's al Hayat Media Centre to subtitle extremist videos. Thus, the organization serves as a cultural/linguistic intermediary to facilitate ISIL's globalizing efforts in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, it potentially serves as a model for organizations with pledged support to the Islamic State such as Boko Haram and al-Shabaab.

Jemaah Islamiyah

ISIL recruitment and the consolidation of allegiance is a dynamic process. In the case of JI, procedural steps are described in the general guide of *Jemaah Islamiyah, The Struggle Guide Series (II)*, a source released by the Central Leadership Council of JI.²¹ The guide articulates doctrinal procedures for the establishment of the Jemaah (group) as it builds internally and as it seeks to join with other groups to form a broader Islamic State in Southeast Asia. These steps form the conditions in which the broader "Caliphate" potentially connects to "Islamic States" in the Sahel, the Maghreb, the Levant, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria.

In the case of JI, recruitment of individuals and other groups occurs within a fundamental stage towards the establishment of the JI Islamic State. According to *al Manhaj al Harakity Li Iqomatid Dien* (The Methodology

to Establish the Religion), recruiting and collaboration constitutes an important step in JI's methodology.²² This process, for example, constitutes a period between offense and defense and focuses on strengthening the organization. It is roughly analogous to the Maoist principle of equilibrium, or shoring up, required before sustained offensive operations. In this component of JI's doctrine, establishing itself as an Islamic State, or declared affiliate at least, is a primary step. The second stage is the development of strength. These steps precede offensive operations to include warnings of actions and armed jihad. This foundation of group development and reinforcement of strengths (organizationally and materially) is required to coordinate and collaborate with other "Islamic States".

Assimilating multiple groups into a unified Caliphate presents significant and historically-based obstacles. These include overcoming differences in motivations for joining; wide variances in material resources and capabilities; variances in challenges by law enforcement; divergences in grievances, and others. In Malaya and Indonesia, for example, Islamic groups consistently failed to coalesce when fighting forces, such as those of the Portuguese or the Dutch, from the 16th century through decolonization. In the Malacca Strait, for instance, commercial interests rather than Islamic principles to expand the *ummah*, or other religious imperatives such as jihad, historically shaped conflict concerning maritime control.²³ This is a powerful indicator that economic motivation, versus ideological drivers, perpetuates ISIL radicalization in the region. Whether ISIL can achieve sustained unification among radicalized populations in

Southeast Asia remains unknown, particularly as divergent interests potentially conflict with ISIL guidance.

Malaysia

In Malaysia, the government appears successful in thwarting ISIL radicalization and recruitment. While this is partially due to diverse and disconnected potential recruits who do not possess networks comparable to those in the Philippines or Indonesia, administrative capacity is notable. This assessment is based on Malaysian Government action including counterterrorist legislation. *The Prevention of Terrorism Act* enacted on September 1, 2015 in particular, provides a useful example of relatively strong legislation in the region.²⁴ Alert governmental action and active partnership building with the United States, such as a terrorist watchlist sharing agreement and cooperation with regional partners, also contains ISIL recruitment. Like the Indonesian Government, Malaysia additionally appears successful in building cooperative counter radicalization and recruitment efforts within the Muslim community and in developing flexible legislation and judicial efforts to review and act upon cases of alleged and suspected terrorism. For these reasons, Malaysia appears successful in its efforts to address the challenges of ISIL radicalization.

While small in number, a U.S. Department of State *Country Report for Terrorism in Malaysia* from 2016 cites 72 Malaysians as members of ISIL.²⁵ With regard to recruitment populations' motivations, Malaysians who join ISIL, or attempt to join the group, represent a highly diverse mix in contrast to potential ISIL adherents in Indonesia. While religious ideology is an

important component for Malaysians supporting ISIL's operations, potential members appear to include highly educated secular-oriented individuals, but also unemployed members of society, drug addicts, and thrill seekers.

An important consensus in the literature on this subject acknowledges ISIL's appeal to individuals for non-ideological and non-religious-based reasons. Additionally, the perception of ISIL's past success contributes a prominent motivation for many potential recruits. Economic factors, such as unemployment however, do not explain strong support for ISIL. As Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, a professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, explains, "the Salafi jihadist-type is one that we need to understand."²⁶ Notably, however, analysts differ on the degree and scope of ISIL presence in Malaysia. Peter Chalk, in a late 2015 Australian Strategic Policy Institute report, viewed Malaysia as possessing a greater ISIL presence than that perceived in Indonesia and the Philippines. In contrast, other analysts perceived ISIL related efforts in the Philippines as the greatest counterterrorism threat in the region.²⁷

Religion is still a defining factor for many recruits when deciding to support the group. However, for this population, ignorance and poorly formed understandings of Islam, especially as it pertains to the purpose of jihad, often lead to the easy manipulation of recruits.²⁸ An example of this effort includes important social responses to manipulation of Islam by the Malaysian National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs. On October 23, 2014, and, again on April 20, 2015, the organization issued *fatwas* prohibiting Malaysian Muslim support for

ISIL.²⁹ The government also appears proactively efficient in blocking ISIL recruitment and in effectively responding to cases of alleged ISIL activity. It is not surprising that much literature on the subject of radicalization emphasizes the need for indigenous, local, community-driven anti-radicalization supported, but not dictated by, the Malaysian Government. In a similar case, Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama, the country's largest Muslim organization, provides a positive example of counter radicalization. In December 2015, for example, it produced a documentary entitled "*Rahmat Islam Nusantara*" (The Divine Grace of Islam Nusantara), which emphasized the validity of religious pluralism and acknowledgment and acceptance of other religious views.³⁰ Similarly, in Malaysia, the Malaysian Islamic Development Authority, which oversees Malaysian mosques and clerics, initiated an anti-ISIL media campaign in 2015.³¹

Despite these counter-ISIL efforts, it is critical to remember that, in the case of Malaysia, the government forbade "non-Sunni practice of Islam, barred Muslims from converting to another religion, and imposed fines, detention, and canings on those classified under the law as Muslim who contravened sharia codes."³² Additionally, according to the U.S. Embassy's *Malaysia 2015 International Religious Freedom Report*, "National identity cards specify religious affiliation, and are used by the governments to determine which citizens are subject to sharia."³³ The document indicates that the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) also propagates anti-Christian and anti-Shia messages through Friday sermons. Additionally, it implements and regulates sharia law while government

officials, such as the Minister of Education, make "anti-Semitic and in some cases, anti-Christian, statements." It is important, therefore, to recognize anti-ISIL statements in the context of Malaysian state control over the practice of Islam. It is useful to keep this in mind and not perceive anti-ISIL messaging as simply a matter of geopolitically minded benevolence on the part of the Malaysian government to counter-ISIL messaging or as some form of unified, global approach to counterterrorism.

Government efforts, even if the motivations do not always line up with western counterterrorism preferences or principles of religious freedom, still matter significantly. Counter-ISIL lines of operation include counterintelligence efforts within the Royal Malaysian Forces (RMF); development of a regional information operations center to counter radical messages; continued cooperation with Muslim religious authorities; and government legislation and adjudication.³⁴ Regarding legislative efforts, in April 2015 the Malaysian Parliament strengthened counterterrorism laws and supported increased funding to review court cases involving ISIL-related arrests. As an example, "four High Court judges in Kuala Lumpur and one judge in Sabah had been assigned to hear ISIL militant and security cases. They were reported to have been trained in particular areas of the law that involved security."³⁵

The question remains, however, how much does ISIL ideology resonate and lead to radicalization in Malaysia? Radicalization factors unique to Malaysia appear unclear and evidence for radicalization depends primarily on qualitative data such as interviews with potential recruits and individuals in academia, government, and law

enforcement. Current literature on radicalization suggests that individuals who seek to join ISIL are motivated by perceptions that ISIL is successful whereas other groups have failed. Certainly, this is a dynamically changing view based on the erosion of ISIL in Syria and Iraq. On one hand, the best method to diffuse ISIL's appeal is continued successful targeting of ISIL personnel and resources, and continued and increased efforts to challenge its narratives, particularly by Islamic-credentialed authorities. On the other hand, a less satisfactory answer is that radicalization remains a difficult process to map empirically in Malaysia. This is because of the diverse population base of potential recruits, their understandably secret routes to potentially joining ISIL, and the fact that it is a relatively small number of individuals who seek to join. ISIL, when it posited Mosul and

Raqqa as symbolic sites, set conditions for its failure since it tied its future to enduring in those environments. The most pressing question becomes how it will evolve elsewhere. In Southeast Asia, as this article suggests, ISIL's future is largely dependent on the efficacy of local and national government.

The Philippines

The extent of the ISIL presence in the Philippines remains disputed among academics, independent researchers, and Philippine Government authorities, particularly the military. However, evidence of ISIL infiltration in Mindanao exists and, as of October 2014, a Philippine Army brigade, an estimated 1,500 soldiers, increased support for intelligence collection in Mindanao, the second largest island in the Philippines.³⁶



Map of Indonesia and neighboring Malaysia, with portions of the Philippines depicted.

Additionally and most recently, operations in Marawi City clearly indicate ISIL-related vitality. The debate over ISIL's presence in the Philippines however centers on individuals and small groups (20 or less) inspired by ISIL, and those who publicly swore allegiance to ISIL in the hope that it may elicit the attention and support of the mother organization. With ISIL's defeat in Iraq and Syria, this dynamic is quickly changing to the detriment of ISIL supporters.

What role, if any, does past, non-ISIL related, conflict between the Philippine government and Filipino Islamic groups, particularly in Muslim Moro-dominated Mindanao, potentially contribute to willingness to support ISIL ideology or expansion? One way of looking at this includes assessing previous splits among insurgent groups on Mindanao. In one case, conflict broke out between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and splinter groups due to disagreement on the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), a peace accord signed in March 2014 between the Philippine Government and the MILF. This agreement served as the basis for the Bangsamoro Basic Law, a power sharing agreement between the MILF and the Philippine Government in the proposed "Bangsamoro Autonomous Region" of western Mindanao that as of summer 2016 was not yet enacted into law.³⁷

However, the greatest issue at stake for the Philippines is not in Southeast Asia or between groups disagreeing over accords with the Philippine Government. The subject of overseas workers is a concern since more than 2.5 million Filipinos reside in the Middle East; 1.2 million in Saudi Arabia; 930,000 in the United Arab Emirates; and an estimated 200,000 in Kuwait and Qatar,

each.³⁸ This is an issue for three reasons: first, the Philippine Government is unable to provide security should a hostage crisis occur. This issue has precedent from 2004 in the Angelo de la Cruz incident.³⁹ As a result of this incident, Filipino journalists called for the Philippine Government to avoid public support for U.S. Government operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq. Third, radicalization of Filipinos returning to the Philippines, specifically overseas Filipino workers, is a serious concern. In one case from September 2015, a Syrian expatriate, Yasir Muhammad Shafiq-al-Barazi and a Filipino woman, Joy Ibana Balinang were arrested in Saudi Arabia for manufacturing explosive belts. Balinang was reported as an overseas Filipino worker who quit employment earlier in 2014.⁴⁰ This case presents a quandary: are such incidents an outlier or a precedent for radicalization and recruitment for "lone-wolf" operations in the Philippines?

ISIL Motivation in Southeast Asia

A fundamental reason for ISIL-related radicalization and recruitment in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines was the perception among adherents that ISIL successfully administered a state. Building upon the prophesied "al Sham" and historic caliphate, "ISIL is seen to be the one group that accomplished what other groups only set out to do but failed to achieve: maintaining and governing territory."⁴¹ With ongoing events in Syria and Iraq, this dynamic is changing rapidly although it is reasonable to expect that some ISIL adherents will move to other regions. In its broader, strategic plan, ISIL focuses its efforts primarily on provocation, a trend likely to continue. According to this strategy, in the view of Andrew Kydd, a

professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Barbara Walter, a scholar at the University of California, San Diego, terrorists attempt to draw a violent government response that potentially, and ideally, harms local citizens and drives the population away from government support and services.⁴²

For ISIL, motivations driving recruitment and radicalization are two-fold: first, they seek replacements for the dwindling numbers of personnel due to battlefield losses in Syria and Iraq; second, their recruitment success depends on the perception of an expanding caliphate. Their destruction in Mosul and Raqqa, and elimination elsewhere, hinders this expansion. Still, expansion, even if not in significant numbers, demonstrates ISIL's reach beyond the Middle East and other regions where terrorism has long held sway, such as Somalia and Nigeria, and into other countries where lone-wolf attacks occur. The perceived success, or failure, of ISIL in Syria and Iraq critically contributes to this phenomenon and it is likely that many other groups, such as the Bangasmore Islamic Freedom Fighters, and more splinter groups may adhere to, or depart from, ISIL's mission for these reasons. For analysts focusing on pro-ISIL radicalization and recruitment, it is useful to keep in mind the historical networks and contexts which preceded ISIL's split with al-Qaeda as much as the network infrastructural changes in ISIL-infected areas.⁴³

ISIL Social Media Operations in Southeast Asia

Social Media

The Taliban were among the first terrorist groups to use Twitter to broadcast their 2011 attacks in Kabul as part of the spring Badr offensive that year.⁴⁴ Since 2011, social media and encrypted messaging services have dynamically complicated and expanded challenges posed by terrorist recruitment and radicalization. As a tool for recruitment and radicalization, similar patterns and processes exist among users in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia.⁴⁵

A typical path to recruitment includes a simple process: information in Facebook directs individuals with interest in ISIL to other channels for vetting and private channels for further proselytizing or conversion. Users may quickly create, delete, or alter social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and other sites, at no cost. Facebook and Twitter also serve as points of entry towards radicalization and receipt of pro-ISIL messages. As an important countermeasure in Southeast Asia, the Indonesian Minister of Communications and Information blocked seventy ISIL-connected websites and blogs at the request of the country's National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT).⁴⁶ Although this was a positive action, social media is transient in nature and ISIL-related content consistently reconstitutes on new sites.

Pro-ISIL websites appear anachronistic in contrast to social media and mobile messaging. Specific sites are relatively easy for governments to block and investigate, although groups such as the Taliban, as well as even more recently established groups

such as MA/Kantibah Nusantara in Indonesia and Malaysia, still host and promote websites. In both cases, these platforms may serve as a type of clearing house that translates pro-ISIL propaganda into local languages and generates promotion of generalized propaganda including profiles and operational narratives.

It is useful to remember that social media sites are not merely communication channels. Most users of Facebook and Twitter, among other sites, use the media to remain in or enter a community and do not actively communicate or participate with other non-community users. Although virtual, relationships and a sense of belonging are central to social media participation. It is easy to regard social media and mobile messaging as only nefarious forms of signal communication, but it is also critical to understand the sense of community these forms of media provide users and how grievances brought to such forums serve as basis for potential radicalization.

In cases where users are isolated from others in their day-to-day reality, the potential of lone wolf radicalization is apparent, particularly in light of recent terrorist attacks such as those in Jakarta, Orlando, Nice, London, and Manchester. The online community, regarded as the “Baqiya family,” is an important example of this development. Best considered as a loose network of ISIL supporters, members form support groups, develop friendships, and share and develop mutual ideologies, although steeped in pro-ISIL radicalized Sunni Islam. As Amarnath Amarasingam, a researcher at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, explains, “If we continue to focus simply on the content put out by the Islamic State, and I’m sure

future jihadist movements, we are overlooking a major part of what is going on.”⁴⁷

In addition to providing a sense of community, the Baqiya family also readily adapts to changes in communications technology. In a way, it provides an internal form of crowdsourcing for coding and as a vehicle for updating others on technological developments in software sharing and encryption. An example of this includes the dynamic development and use of mobile messaging platforms, especially Telegram Messenger and WhatsApp.

Mobile Messaging

Commercially available applications that allow anyone to send encrypted text and voice messages have become important tools for communication among insurgent and terrorist groups. In the case of the attacks in Brussels in 2016, terrorists used communication encryption applications to keep analysts from tracking their efforts.⁴⁸ Telegram Messenger, an application of great importance to ISIL, was a central communication platform for the January 2016 Jakarta terrorist attack.⁴⁹ ISIL is a primary proponent in this development and ISIL-inspired propaganda expanded significantly in late 2015 in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia.

Encryption training for ISIL operatives in Raqqa was formerly overseen by Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, an individual formerly referred to as a principal ISIS spokesperson.⁵⁰ Al-Adnani was detained in Iraq by coalition forces in 2005 but then released in 2010. After 2011, he became a “principal architect in ISIL’s external relations” and “coordinated the movement of ISIL fighters, directly encouraged lone-wolf

attacks on civilians and members of the military and actively recruited” before he was killed in Aleppo, Syria in late August 2016.⁵¹ As a core-member of ISIL, al-Adnani trained others to conduct attacks without direct tactical guidance and he utilized encryption software to coordinate efforts without his presence. According to Michael Smith of Kronos Advisory, this capacity “really plays into the larger theater of terrorism. It amplifies the fear factor when we realize that this group can communicate with people around the world in ways that intelligence services cannot quickly identify and ascertain what is contained in the correspondence.”⁵²

Potential ISIL supporters in Southeast Asia increasingly turn to mobile messaging applications for detailed guidance, typically after demonstrating interest through media such as Facebook. Notably, Facebook acquired WhatsApp in February 2014 and, as the most popular messaging application worldwide, had more than one billion users by early 2016.⁵³ WhatsApp, however, provides inadequate levels of privacy protection; that may be a key reason motivating violent extremist organizations to use Telegram Messenger which provides a high-degree of privacy through encryption.⁵⁴

End-to-end encryption relies on technology utilizing mathematical operations run on digital data to ensure privacy. In most cases, this technology does not allow the app developers to open or decrypt messages; this seriously challenges law enforcement and intelligence services. For users, it obviously provides an end-to-end secure communication chain since all that matters, to them, is the privacy such encryption provides. Telegram also offers a feature entitled Secret Chats technology. This feature allows users to

program messaging for automatic self-destruction by programmed devices, so that only intended recipients can read messages. Also important are extended sharing apps, such as broadcast lists. Broadcast lists enable users to create digital dissemination of content for up to five thousand members that, in turn, distribute links for further message dissemination. Additionally, Telegram includes channel messaging which may reach unlimited numbers of users. However, in November 2015, the messaging service blocked 78 ISIL-related channels in twelve languages.⁵⁵

In November 2016 through its Telegram-based Khilafah News Channel—one of the very channels blocked by Telegram—ISIL addressed communication security issues among its members in response to warnings issued by the hacker group Anonymous after the Paris attacks that month.⁵⁶ This incident highlights the importance of adaptation and adjustment among both terrorists and law enforcement and intelligence agencies seeking to contain them. It is likely, therefore, that similar processes will continue as other messaging services and platforms evolve for communication.

Conclusion

In Southeast Asia, Foreign-Trained Fighters (FTF) returning from Iraq and Syria pose a threat to countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Regionally, however, ISIL’s failure to publicly affirm pledged allegiances of Southeast Asian groups such as MA, ASG, and JI is notable. Instead, ISIL offers only indirect operational guidance and well-developed propaganda, although it does demonstrate highly experienced information operations guidance.

This article argued that ISIL's reach to, and reception in, Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines is a credible but not an existential threat for these countries. While ISIL could potentially establish a small province in Southeast Asia, it appears unlikely, especially with the demise of ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, there are at least two significant challenges ISIL still poses to the region. First, it is critical to address the dynamic increase of social media based communication and messaging applications that, at this point, no longer need direct ISIL involvement for recruitment and radicalization for pro-ISIL or similar ideologies. The second challenge, where solutions are potentially achievable, concerns the content of ISIL messaging. Continued cooperative efforts, such as those between governments and Islamic communities in particular, are perhaps the most important measures towards challenging the ideological potency of ISIL. On this point, Southeast Asian countries, and especially those with moderate religious constituencies, appear to be on the right track.

Based on the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines' demonstrated interest in strengthening rule of law and increasing counterterrorism capabilities, the best way forward is increased capacity building and cooperative efforts with the United States and others. Admittedly, this is often difficult because of political pressures and challenges to continued collaboration yet opportunities exist. In the case of Mosul's destruction, assisting in the rebuilding of the city provides a small-scale "Marshall Plan" type of opportunity for the United States to help facilitate Iraqi administrative capacity

for reconstruction. A similar, much smaller-scale related case may exist for Marawi City in Mindanao. The example of "rebuilding" contrasts significantly with the nihilism advocated by ISIL, wherever it exists. The United States and its regional partners, in all cases, share Southeast Asia's regional security concerns and in building individual nations' capacity to ensure domestic security. The best solutions for these countries, in their efforts to counter-ISIL recruitment and radicalization therefore, is continued support for viable, local initiatives. Another step is continued provision of technical and culturally aware institution building assistance when feasible. This will be much more successful than tarnished neocolonial-like notions that guidance should stem from altruistic imperatives driven by liberal internationalism. [PRISM](#)

Notes

¹ "ISIS—The End of The Sykes-Picot Agreement," May 27, 2015, available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSNCPj7s6vI>>.

² V. Arianti and Jasminder Singh, "ISIS' Southeast Asia Unit: Raising the Security Threat," October 19, 2015, RSIS Commentary, No.220, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

³ "WhatsApp must not be a 'place for terrorists to hide,'" BBC, March 26, 2017, available at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-39396578>>.

⁴ Abdurajik Abubakar Janjalani gathered members of the Moro National Liberation Front to form the Abu Sayaf Group in 1991 to establish an independent Islamic State in the Philippines. He was influenced by Wahhabi Islamist doctrine through experience in Afghanistan. See Thomas Koruth Samuel, "Radicalisation in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of Daesh in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2016, 98. Jemmah Islamiyah (JI), based on the radical Darul Islam movement from the 1940–50s, was formally founded on 1 January 1993, by JI leaders, Abu Bakar Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar while hiding in Malaysia from the persecution of the Suharto government. It had ties to Osama Bin Laden as of 1998.

⁵ Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015," June 2, 2016, 57, available at <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/>>. Editorial note—the July 2017 release of the "U.S. State Department Country Reports on Terrorism 2016" coincided with the pre-publication process for PRISM. The author did, however, have the opportunity to review the 2016 State Department report and confirm that its release does not counter his analysis prior to the printing of PRISM 7.1.

⁶ Brian Harrison, *Southeast Asia: A Short History*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 258.

⁷ Dirk Tomsa, "The Jakarta Terror Attack and its Implications for Indonesian and Regional Security," February 5, 2016, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, 2016, No. 5, 3; Thomas Koruth Samuel, "Radicalization in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of Daesh in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2016, 68.

⁸ Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015," June 2, 2016, 68, available at <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/>> ; Peter Chalk, "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," Strategy, ASPI-Australian Strategic Policy Institute, December 2015, 11.

⁹ Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015," June 2, 2016, 69, available at <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/>>.

¹⁰ Ricardo Saludo, "How Grave is the ISIL Threat to the Philippines?" *The Manila Times*, October 10, 2014, available at <<https://www.stratfor.com/the-hub/how-grave-isis-threat-philippines>>, accessed June 1, 2016.

¹¹ Thomas Koruth Samuel, "Radicalisation in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of Daesh in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2016, 56.

¹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹³ Dirk Tomsa, "The Jakarta Terror Attack and its Implications for Indonesian and Regional Security," February 5, 2016, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, 2016, No. 5, 7; "ISIS in Ambon: The Fallout from Communal Conflict," 13 May 2016, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), Report 28, page 10.

¹⁴ See Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria, The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine*, Princeton Studies in World Politics, 6, (New York: Praeger, 1964), 65.

¹⁶ Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015," June 2, 2016, 70, available at <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/>>.

¹⁷ Thomas Koruth Samuel, "Radicalisation in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of Daesh in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2016, 67; Peter Chalk, "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," Strategy, ASPI-Australian Strategic Policy Institute, December 2015, 12.

¹⁸ "ISIS in Ambon: The Fallout from Communal Conflict," 13 May 2016, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), Report Number 28, page 6.

¹⁹ Thomas Koruth Samuel, "Radicalisation in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of Daesh in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2016, 50.

²⁰ Jasminder Singh, *Katibah Nusantara: Islamic State's Malay Archipelago Combat Uni*, RSIS Commentary, No. 126, May 26, 2015, available at <<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/CO15126.pdf>>.

²¹ The Central Leadership Council of Jemaah Islamiyah, *General Guide Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyyah, The Struggle Guide Series (II)*.

²² *Ibid.* 4–5.

²³ Brian Harrison, *Southeast Asia: A Short History*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 82.

²⁴ Peter Chalk, "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," *Strategy*, ASPI-Australian Strategic Policy Institute, December 2015, 5–6.

²⁵ Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015," June 2, 2016, 73, available at <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/>>.

²⁶ "ISIS and Islamic Radicalization in Southeast Asia, An Interview with Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman," *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs*, Winter 2016, 159.

²⁷ Peter Chalk.

²⁸ Thomas Koruth Samuel, "Radicalisation in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of Daesh in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2016, 84.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 84.

³⁰ Azis Anwar Fachrudin, "Indonesia's Islam Nusantara: A Challenge to the Islamic State?" *The Jakarta Post*, June 6, 2016, available at <<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/12/18/indonesia-s-islam-nusantara-a-challenge-islamic-state.html>>, accessed June 8, 2016; U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015".

³¹ "Malaysia 2015 International Religious Freedom Report," August 10, 2016, U.S. Embassy in Malaysia, available at <https://my.usembassy.gov/irf2015_my-081016/>, accessed February 19, 2017.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Thomas Koruth Samuel.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 81.

³⁶ Ricardo Saludo, "How Grave is the ISIS Threat to the Philippines?" *The Manila Times*, October 10, 2014. <https://www.stratfor.com/the-hub/how-grave-isis-threat-philippines>, accessed 1 June 2016.

³⁷ Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015," June 2, 2016, 79, available at <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/>>.

³⁸ Thomas Koruth Samuel, 107; Ricardo Saludo, "How Grave is the ISIS Threat to the Philippines?" *The Manila Times*, October 10, 2014, available at <<https://www.stratfor.com/the-hub/how-grave-isis-threat-philippines>>, accessed June 1, 2016.

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⁴² Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Summer, 2006), 69–70.

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⁴⁴ "Taliban Announce Beginning of their 'Spring Offensive,'" *Bill Roggio*, April 30, 2011, *Long War Journal*, available at <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/04/taliban_announce_beg.php>.

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⁴⁶ Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015," June 2, 2016, 69, available at <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/>>.

⁴⁷ Amarnath Amarasingam, "What Twitter Really Means for Islamic State Supporters," *War on the Rocks*, December 30, 2015, available at <<http://warontherocks.com/2015/12/what-twitter-really-means-for-islamic-state-supporters/>>.

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⁴⁹ "ISIS in Ambon: The Fallout from Communal Conflict," 13 May 2016, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), Report 28, page 8.

⁵⁰ BBC News, "Islamic State: Abu Muhammad al-Adnani 'killed in Aleppo,'" August 31, 2016, available at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37224570>>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² "Terrorists Escape Detection Using Common Encryption Tools, National Public Radio, March 25, 2016.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Tech2 Analysis, February 13, 2015, available at <<http://tech.firstpost.com/news-analysis/whatsapp-security-flaw-allows-anyone-to-track-you-regardless-of-your-privacy-settings-254265.html>>, accessed June 7, 2016.

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⁵⁶ Anna Dubuis, Mirror, November 16, 2015, "Anonymous declares war on Islamic State after Paris attacks in chilling video: 'We will hunt you down,'" available at <<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/anonymous-declares-war-islamic-state-6839030>>.

⁵⁷ Madhumita Murgia, "Islamic State issues anti-hacking guidelines after Anonymous threats," 17 November 2015, The Telegraph, November 17, 2015, available at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/internet-security/12001420/Islamic-State-issues-anti-hacking-guidelines-after-Anonymous-threats.html>>, accessed 08 June 2016.

Photo

Page 90. "Bombing on Marawi City" available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Marawi#/media/File:Bombing_on_Marawi_City.jpg, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. < <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>. Produced unaltered.