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The evolution of jihadist-Salafism in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines, and its impact on security in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of jihadist-Salafism, an extreme and violent variant of militant Sunni Islamism, in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines. The paper contends that while these three countries have made great strides against jihadi-Salafists since the September 2001 attacks in the US, the continuing evolution of jihadist-Salafism presents a severe security challenge to the countries themselves, and the wider region including Australia.

The paper argues that Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines must build on their successes and do even more to combat jihadist-Salafism, warning that unless this challenge is met in a nuanced and coordinated fashion, the stability of Southeast Asia will be threatened. The paper concludes by noting that ongoing events in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia provide a dire warning of the consequences of underestimating the threat.

The evolution of jihadist-Salafism in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines, and its impact on security in Southeast Asia

Introduction

Jihadist-Salafism, an extreme and violent variant of militant Sunni Islamism, currently presents a serious security challenge to law and order in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines.¹ Global jihadi-Salafist events since the September 2001 al Qa'ida attacks in New York and Washington DC, including terrorist attacks, separatist insurgencies and civil wars, suggest that these three governments, each with their own unique challenges, will need to invest considerable effort in tackling jihadist-Salafism in the next ten years and beyond.

This paper will analyse the evolution of jihadist-Salafism in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines and detail its implications for security. It will argue that jihadist-Salafism provides a theological justification for violence, whether or not there are other motivating factors, and that its adherents opportunistically prey on regions with poor governance.

The focus for the paper will primarily be on events since the 'war on terror' after September 2001 and the more recent rise of Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and this group's effect on local jihadi-Salafists.² Key groups in each of the three countries will be covered, as will the response by authorities to each of these groups and the respective responses to the ideology of jihadist-Salafism itself. These three countries have been chosen because of the strength of active jihadi-Salafist groups within their borders, their inter-connectedness and the threat they pose.

The central theme of the paper is that the evolution of jihadist-Salafism in these countries presents a severe security challenge to the countries themselves, and the wider region including Australia, and that unless this challenge is met in a nuanced and coordinated fashion, the stability of Southeast Asia will be threatened—with events in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia showing just how badly things can turn out. After analysing the threats posed by jihadist-Salafism, Part 6 of the paper will introduce a range of policy and operational responses that may assist the three governments in addressing the security challenges posed by jihadi-Salafists.³

What is jihadist-Salafism?

Jihadist-Salafism emphasises the importance of returning to a 'pure' form of Islam, that of the *Salaf*, the pious ancestors. Further, this ideology propagates the notion that violent *jihad*, or struggle, is a personal religious duty.⁴ Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the respective leaders of al Qa'ida and ISIS, can be categorised as jihadi-Salafists.

Jihadi-Salafists from the Middle East typically denounce elections as placing man's law above God's; their main foes are the 'near enemy' (Arab rulers), the 'far enemy' (the West) and Shia Muslims.⁵ There are a number of groups in Southeast Asia which subscribe to the jihadist-Salafism ideology. They include but are not limited to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which operates in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and The Philippines; Jemaah Anshurah Taihid, which operates in Indonesia; and Abu Sayyaf Group, which operates in The Philippines.⁶ The security challenges posed by these groups and others will be discussed later in this paper.

What is meant by an impact on security?

There is dense theoretical debate about what 'security' means in international relations and many definitions are values laden, representing one political view or another.⁷ Indeed, it is a highly-contested concept among scholars and practitioners, with no agreed or universally-accepted definition.⁸ For the purposes of this paper, the context in which security will be used is the ability for a state to maintain control of its territorial borders, provide a decent level of services for its people (such as health and education), sustain a functioning economy, and maintain law and order.⁹ A key component of a secure state, therefore, is its ability to maintain

law and order, which requires the state to effectively regulate the conduct of its citizens and, in return, provide the basic arrangements that allow it to protect the life and property of those citizens.¹⁰

This paper argues that jihadi-Salafist groups in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines have undermined security for several decades and that if they are left unchecked, they will continue to do so in the years ahead. The responses by the respective governments, individually and collectively, will determine the degree to which these groups undermine security for the next ten years, and possibly much longer.

What is Islamisation, Islamism, Wahhabism, a majority-Muslim nation and an Islamic state?

There are many terms and concepts used to describe the rise of jihadist-Salafism and related ideologies and events. This includes 'Islamisation', 'Islamism', 'Wahhabism', 'majority-Muslim nation' and 'Islamic state'. Different authors sometimes use these terms synonymously and/or ambiguously.¹¹ For the purpose of clarity, the following definitions will be used in this paper.

Islamisation refers to the intensification of Islamic belief and practice in a society among those who are already Muslim.¹² **Islamism** is a commitment to comprehensively implement an ideological vision of Islam in the state and society. Whether Islamisation necessarily leads to Islamism depends on a number of factors and is by no means a certainty. Islamisation can represent a legitimate expression of political aspiration in a democracy. However, this paper will argue that increasing Islamisation in Southeast Asia contributes to a conducive environment for jihadist-Salafism to take hold and prosper.

The term **Wahhabism** is often used synonymously with Salafism but is not the same thing. While adherents of both ideologies reject religious and political pluralism, as well as propagating an Islam that is allegedly a more perfect and unsullied version based on the early years of the faith, they differ in that Wahhabism has its modern origins in Saudi Arabia, whereas Salafism has its modern origins across the Middle East but particularly in Egypt.¹³ Dennis Ignatius, a retired Malaysian diplomat, has a less flattering interpretation:

Wahhabism, the official religion of Saudi Arabia, is an exceptionally virulent, narrow and militant interpretation of Islam based on the teachings of an austere 18th century preacher and scholar, Muhammad al-Wahhab (1703-92). Over time, it has morphed into an all-encompassing politico-religious theology that considers all other faith groups deviant, has no tolerance for other cultures, no respect for human rights, no love for democracy and an abiding distaste of Western values. It is harsh, puritanical, unforgiving and violent.¹⁴

It is also important to distinguish two other terms. A **majority-Muslim nation** is one where the majority of people are Muslims; **an Islamic state**, on the other hand, is one that bases its political legitimacy on Islam.¹⁵

Jihadist-Salafism's theological justification for violence

Jihadist-Salafism promotes revolutionary violence to establish a caliphate, or an Islamic state.¹⁶ In other words, jihadi-Salafists believe they are authorised to commit violent acts in the name of Islam. Further, jihadist-Salafism challenges Western norms and liberal democratic values, and its followers reject religious and moral pluralism.¹⁷ To be clear, this paper does not assert that Islam and democracy are incompatible in Southeast Asia or elsewhere. Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines are all, to varying degrees, democracies. The first two are majority-Muslim nations and the third has an influential Muslim minority. They demonstrate that Islam and democracy are not mutually exclusive.

However, this paper argues that jihadist-Salafism is a manifestation of Islamic practice—an extremely dangerous and pervasive manifestation—and one that poses challenges for any nation-state, democratic or otherwise. If coupled with tribal, ethnic, economic or geo-political divisions, as is often the case, it is even more dangerous.¹⁸

The preceding paragraphs argue that jihadist-Salafism provides a theological justification for violence. However, as then British Prime Minister David Cameron stated in July 2015, 'you don't have to support violence to subscribe to certain intolerant ideas which create a climate in which extremists can flourish'.¹⁹ He further asserted that:

The extremist world view is the gateway, and violence is the ultimate destination.... No-one becomes a terrorist from a standing start. It starts with a process of radicalization. When you look in detail at the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were first influenced by what some would call non-violent extremists.

There is a certain logic to Cameron's assertions. If we apply this thinking to Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines, it becomes apparent that not only do the violent jihadi-Salafists require ongoing attention from authorities but so do those who promote the ideology. Put another way, there is an ideological, theological and political struggle underway that cuts across cultures, nations and civilisations, between the vast majority of moderate and peaceful adherents of Islam and the jihadi-Salafists.²⁰ This struggle is global, and Southeast Asia is a key battleground.

Part 1: Islam, the Middle East and Southeast Asia

Islam moves to Southeast Asia

Islam in Southeast Asia has been, for the most part, a moderate and modernising force.²¹ It was introduced into Indonesia by traders from the Middle East and South Asia more than 700 years ago. For the most part, it was an accommodating form of Islam and blended with local customs.²² In Indonesia, it is sometimes referred to as 'Archipelago Islam' or Islam *Nusantara*, and was initially influenced by Hinduism and ancient Javanese religions.²³ At the end of the 19th century, waves of 'reformist' conservative Islam came from the Middle East seeking to 'modernise' Islam in Indonesia.²⁴

Since then, a tension between a local, more tolerant Islam and an imported, conservative and pious Islam has existed.²⁵ Since Indonesia's independence in 1945, the tension has often resulted in a violent radical fringe seeking the imposition of *shariah* law.²⁶ Over the last 20 years, in particular, conservative Islam has increased in importance in the daily lives of many Indonesians, whether this is reflected in the increasing popularity of Islamic dress or growing sales of Islamic literature.²⁷ Strikingly, this same period of increasing adherence to imported Middle Eastern practices has witnessed a string of murderous jihadi-Salafist attacks in Indonesia.

Islam in Malaysia, like in Indonesia, was introduced by traders from the Middle East and South Asia over 700 years ago. From Malaysia and Indonesia, it spread into the southern Philippines, although there is some evidence that Chinese Muslims may have also played a role in the spread of Islam into the southern Philippines, eastern Indonesia and Malaysia.²⁸ Islam has arguably had a greater impact on Malaysian society and political development than any other nation in Southeast Asia.

Of particular note, the Malays have a centuries-old history of Islamic states, especially on the Malay Peninsula with its nine sultanates. This closer attachment between Islam and the state in Malaysia, compared to the situations in Indonesia and The Philippines, highlights the uneven spread of the religion throughout Southeast Asia. This unevenness can be seen in differing levels of 'Islamic-ness' across the three countries, as well as in an inconsistent spread of accommodating and moderate Islamic practices, against pockets of pious and conservative practices within each country.²⁹

Islam had gained a strong foothold in The Philippines by the time the Spanish arrived in the early 16th century, particularly in the south. If not for the arrival of the Spanish and their introduction of the Roman Catholic religion, it is highly likely that The Philippines would have become a majority-Muslim nation like Indonesia and Malaysia.³⁰ Notably, the relationship between Islam and Christianity in The Philippines was one of adjacent development, and not integration or assimilation.³¹

This had a particularly profound effect in the southern Philippines, where a once-majority Muslim population, known as the Moro people, estimated to be around 98 per cent in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago in 1913, waned rapidly as a result of large-scale, government-encouraged resettlement from Christian regions. By 1999, the Muslim population in the southern Philippines was a minority in what it regarded as its ancestral homelands.³² This changing religious composition, coupled with social and economic dislocation from the north of the country, has played a significant part in a politico-religious Muslim separatist movement that has plagued The Philippines from the second half of the 20th century until today.

The paragraphs above highlight Islam's long history in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines, and also underscore the diversity of Islamic practice and integration across the region. The history of Islam in Southeast Asia is one of a religion that has developed in its own context, and been influenced by its people, geography and pre-existing cultures, which explains its generally-moderate outlook. However, it has also been, from time to time, influenced by deep connections with the conservative Islamic practices of the Middle East, especially among the more devout Muslim practitioners in Southeast Asia.³³

World events since September 2001 and their effect on jihadist-Salafism in Southeast Asia

The events of September 2001 ushered in an era of expansionist and hyper-violent jihadist-Salafism that has continued until today. While al Qa'ida was not the only jihadi-Salafist group, from September 2001 until Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared his caliphate in June 2014, it was by far the pre-eminent group of its type.

Al Qa'ida was a galvanising force for the world's jihadi-Salafists, and it directed or inspired a number of devastating terrorist attacks in the early years of the 21st century, including but not limited to the Bali tourist district bombings of October 2002, the Madrid train bombing of March 2004, and the London public transport bombings of July 2005. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq also provided al Qa'ida with an opportunity to further its war against the West—and it was from the seeds of this insurgency and brutality in Iraq that ISIS, an al Qa'ida off-shoot, was born.³⁴

While it suffered many setbacks between 2001 and 2016, including the death of Osama Bin-Laden in 2011, al Qa'ida was reduced but not destroyed in Afghanistan or Iraq. Arguably, the years immediately after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 saw the influence of jihadist-Salafism spread across the globe, not least because the insurgency in Iraq was drawing a disproportionate amount of political focus, blood and treasure of the US and its alliance partners. David Kilcullen has observed that:

[O]nce the insurgency in Iraq really hit its stride after March 2004, the demand for resources created by the escalating conflict, like the cost in lives lost and ruined, was stupendous, as was the drain on policy makers' attention. It was impossible to get leaders to focus on resurgent violence in Afghanistan, the emergence of al-Shabaab in Somalia, the growing Pakistani Taliban, rising anti-Americanism in countries subjected to drone strikes, proliferating terror cells in Europe, AQ [al Qa'ida] franchises in other continents, or any of the other issues we could have addressed—and perhaps prevented—had the United States and its allies (including Australia and the UK) not been mired in Iraq.³⁵

Significantly, the Iraq war was not just a terrible distraction from Afghanistan or al Qa'ida that allowed the spread of jihadist-Salafism elsewhere to go unchecked, as Kilcullen argues, but it also served as a unifying force for many Muslims around the world, whether disposed to violence or not, as it fed into a narrative of Western persecution and encouraged many Muslims to feel part of an international community of grievance.³⁶ However, this was not new, as earlier generations of jihadi-Salafists had previously tapped into the same sentiment on issues around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Soviet war in Afghanistan.³⁷

By the time of the Arab Spring in 2011, jihadi-Salafist groups were successfully operating in North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia; the world was effectively witnessing a global insurgency, although many government officials, academics and the general public remained unaware or were deliberately ignorant. The Arab Spring, and in particular the civil war in Syria, further spurred these groups and, in late 2011, still under the loose command

of what might be called 'al Qa'ida central', Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was directed to expand operations from Iraq into Syria.³⁸ The story of ISIS's subsequent success will not be detailed here, save to say that when al-Baghdadi declared his caliphate in June 2014, it struck a chord with many jihadi-Salafists around the world.³⁹

Jihadi-Salafists in Southeast Asia were not immune from the post-September 2001 contagion. In particular, the Iraq war and then the civil war in Syria were invigorating for their respective causes, and they re-activated connections with foreign groups that went back as far as the Soviet war in Afghanistan.⁴⁰ Connections with Islamists in the Middle East and South Asia, typically established through pilgrimages and education at overseas *madrassas* (Islamic religious schools), provided a network through which jihadi-Salafists could communicate.

In Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines, groups with primarily local grievances and their own objectives were inspired by or worked directly with foreign jihadi-Salafists in relationships of mutual benefit. Indeed, Southeast Asia in general became something of a 'back office' for al Qa'ida and other groups, as a transit hub, training ground, financial centre or hideout.⁴¹

While international jihadist-Salafism has connected with and influenced events in Southeast Asia, it is necessary to explore the local groups and circumstances more closely in order to assess the current and future threats for the region. The next three parts of the paper will analyse the evolution of jihadist-Salafism in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines, as well as the key groups and their origins.

Part 2: Indonesia

The language of the Prophet is not the spoken language here. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is geographically distant, despite the widespread presence of Al Jazeera in people's homes and the resultant public relations victory of the Gaza Palestinians. Islamic law is applied sparingly and is not always revered. Most importantly, Indonesia is a democracy where people are unafraid of having their thoughts on religion printed, for fear of retribution from either the government or radical groups. Thus, Indonesia provides the level playing field necessary to establish the true vision and philosophical texture of Islam in the twenty-first century.⁴²

The effects of jihadist-Salafism on Indonesia's nascent democracy

The Indonesian state is founded on a political philosophy known as *Pancasila*, which is based on five principles: social justice; belief in one God; a just and civilised humanity; government by the will and consent of the people; and Indonesian unity.⁴³ In essence, these principles promote religious and cultural freedoms, human rights and social justice.⁴⁴

Since the 1998 pro-democracy street demonstrations that led to the fall of the military-backed, authoritarian Suharto regime, Indonesia has implemented democracy and is considered to provide a glowing example of a majority-Muslim nation which has transitioned from dictatorship to democracy.⁴⁵ In the year of the Arab Spring in 2011, then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made this very point.⁴⁶

While there is no inherent bias in majority-Muslim nations against democracy, a moderate and tolerant version of Islam is key.⁴⁷ And it is *Pancasila* that provides the framework for Indonesia's moderate version of Islam, *Islam Nusantara*, to flourish. However, extremists can undermine any democracy. Therefore, when analysing the threats posed by jihadi-Salafists in Indonesia, it is important to consider what effect, if any, there is on *Pancasila* and democracy when there is an overlap of beliefs between violent and non-violent groups—beliefs such as a desire to implement *shariah* law or to establish a caliphate.

To draw this out further, should democracy start to falter, perhaps undermined from within by so-called non-violent groups, governance may weaken and, in turn, the ability for the state to maintain law and order may suffer. With this in mind, it is important to consider a selection of jihadi-Salafist groups that have undermined law and order in Indonesia.

Darul Islam and JI

Darul Islam was a separatist movement in Indonesia that began in 1948 and which sought to establish an Islamic state ruled by *shariah* law.⁴⁸ It followed a particularly Indonesian ideological pathway in that it was influenced by both Wahhabism and the anti-colonial nationalism enshrined in the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.⁴⁹ Darul Islam was very much a product of its time and its principal goal was to see newly post-colonial Indonesia established as an Islamic state.

When the moderate and largely-secular nationalist leaders such as Sukarno and Hatta rejected Islam as the sole foundation of the state, Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwirjo, who had led an anti-Dutch militia, accused them of crimes against Islam and commenced a separatist insurgency that would spread to nine regions of Indonesia, where he established political and military commands. These regions were Aceh, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, East Java, Central Java, Jakarta, West Priangan and East Priangan.⁵⁰

By the time Darul Islam was militarily defeated in 1962, the lives of 25,000 people had been lost. The social movement that supported it, however, was not defeated and the fact it had established networks across the country during the conflict allowed those adherents not killed or captured to go underground, only to re-surface after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998.⁵¹ Darul Islam survived because its militant ideology and aspirations lived on. In particular, the co-founders of JI, Sheik Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Bashir, had been close associates of the Darul Islam leader, Kartosuwirjo, and for over 30 years they remained fervently dedicated to establishing Indonesia as an Islamic state. In this period, they were jailed for participating in a clandestine militia, released, charged again, fled and sought refuge in Malaysia.⁵²

Sungkar and Bashir travelled in the 1980s to Saudi Arabia, then Afghanistan, and became important figures in organising Southeast Asian recruits to fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Virtually all the senior leadership of what would become JI studied and trained between 1985 and 1995 in camps in the mountainous border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Close connections with al-Qa'ida were established, and bonds were formed with other militants, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Abu Sayyaf Group.⁵³ These global connections influenced Sungkar and Bashir to break away from Darul Islam and formally establish JI in January 1993. It subscribed to an ideology that emphasised global jihadist-Salafism, which stood it apart from Darul Islam's more Indonesia-centric goals.⁵⁴

The fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 allowed Sungkar and Bashir to return home to Indonesia. Sungkar died in 1999 and Bashir assumed the leadership of JI. He built support in the uncertain post-Suharto years by highlighting the failure of nationalist projects to deliver political, economic and social benefits to Muslims, and arguing that only an Islamic state could deliver such justice.⁵⁵ In this period, JI began a wave of attacks across the country, including the bombing of the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta in April 1999 and the residence of The Philippines' Ambassador in Jakarta in August 2000.

But it was not until the devastating Bali bombings in October 2002, which killed 202 people—including 88 Australians—and the extensive investigations that followed, that the Indonesian Government was willing to acknowledge that it faced a home-grown terrorist threat with global connections. It is particularly noteworthy that despite advice from the Malaysian and Singapore governments before the Bali bombings that Bashir and his field commander Riduan Isamuddin, also known as Hambali, were the directing figures in a transnational terrorist network, no discernible action was taken against JI.⁵⁶

The Bali bombings, and then the Marriot Hotel car-bomb attack in August 2003, spurred the Indonesian Government to comprehensively respond. The Indonesian police, with significant technical assistance, advice and support from the Australian Federal Police, tracked down, arrested or killed every one of the masterminds or integral members of JI involved.

The Indonesian Government also introduced an anti-terrorism law that, among other things, extended the period for which police could detain a suspected terrorist for up to 20 days, which

could then be extended for another six months. They also established an Anti-Terrorism Task Force comprised of relevant officials from the National Intelligence Agency, military intelligence and police intelligence.⁵⁷ By 2007, the scrutiny from the Indonesian Government resulted in JI ostensibly renouncing violence and, on the surface at least, steering its followers towards religious outreach and education.⁵⁸ Of course, it may well simply have been repeating the earlier approach of its parent organisation, Darul Islam, whereby networks and contacts established over many years could re-emerge with deadly intent.

Jemaah Anshurah Taihid and Mujahidin Indonesia Timor

Darul Islam and JI are not the only jihadi-Salafist groups to have challenged law and order in Indonesia. Other groups remain a current threat. One such group is Jemaah Anshurah Taihid, which was founded by Bashir, the former spiritual leader of JI, with the notional intent of eventually implementing a caliphate in Indonesia. Jemaah Anshurah Taihid subscribed to the ideology of jihadist-Salafism and adopted two ideals; first, to be militarily prepared; and second, that local Indonesian officials who did not adhere to Islamic law would be as important targets as Westerners.⁵⁹

Bashir was imprisoned in 2010 when Indonesian counter-terrorism police uncovered a Jemaah Anshurah Taihid terrorist training camp. However, the group has remained active and, in fact since 2011, has undertaken several lethal terrorist actions, including suicide-bomb attacks in Cirebon and Solo, as well as the assassination of Indonesian police officers.⁶⁰ It also has pledged allegiance to ISIS.⁶¹

Mujahidin Indonesia Timor is a breakaway group of Jemaah Anshurah Taihid, established in Poso in Central Sulawesi by Santoso, alias Abu Wardah.⁶² Mujahidin Indonesia Timor is considered a nationalist Islamist group with possible international connections. Santoso has assembled a group of combat veterans and, in part because it does not target civilians, his group has posed difficulties for the Indonesian authorities to dismantle.⁶³ The Poso area has rough terrain, and Indonesian media has speculated that the group may receive protection from locals.⁶⁴

However, the Indonesian police, which established a special task force under the name Operation TINOMBALA, recently seized 86 homemade bombs, factory-made rifles and a shotgun, as well as a number of homemade rifles, shotguns and ammunition.⁶⁵ While this is a policing success, it demonstrates the potential that Mujahidin Indonesia Timor possesses for large-scale attacks on soft targets. It also has pledged allegiance to ISIS.

The Indonesian response to jihadist-Salafism, and its importance to Southeast Asia, and perhaps the world

As the country with the world's largest population of Muslims, and a rare example where a majority-Muslim nation has embraced democracy, how Indonesia addresses the rise of ISIS and jihadist-Salafism generally is important to Indonesia and the international community at large.⁶⁶ Since September 2001 and the declaration by President George W. Bush of a global war on terror, successive Indonesian governments have been careful not to appear to be doing the bidding of Western nations when tackling jihadist-Salafism and not to appear as anti-Islam generally.⁶⁷ And yet Indonesian presidents have nevertheless been able to argue strongly that jihadi-Salafists pose a threat to Indonesia.

Further, some of Indonesia's largest religious organisations have added their weight to campaigns against jihadist-Salafism, arguing that its ideology is alien to Indonesia's Islamic traditions.⁶⁸ Indonesian authorities are, therefore, well placed to continue the fight against jihadist-Salafism. However, a larger question arises, that is, is Indonesia confident enough to do more than fight jihadist-Salafism within its own borders but go further and inspire Muslims throughout the world to practise a more tolerant version of Islam, an 'Archipelago Islam', instead of the version being offered by the likes of al Qa'ida and ISIS? The answer to this question will unfold over the next decade and beyond.

Part 3: Malaysia

Jihadist-Salafism in Malaysia

The problem of jihadist-Salafism existed in Malaysia well before the September 2001 attacks in the US and the subsequent period that is the focus of this paper. From the 1970s onwards, and up until the 1990s, a number of groups with claims that the Malaysian government was not giving Islam its proper due surfaced from time to time. However, the troubles were generally locally focused and suppressed by the police, often through extremely efficient use of detention and investigative powers under the *Internal Security Act*.⁶⁹ The dominant party in Malaysian politics, the United Malays National Organisation, also accused the main opposition party, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, in the 1980s and 1990s of supporting Islamic militancy.

While some links between the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party and jihadi-Salafists existed, and indeed arguably exist to this day, the Malaysian government was nonetheless criticised for being particularly cynical in exploiting fears about Islamic militancy for political advantage and, in doing so, ruthlessly suppressing the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party. This was particularly highlighted by a police raid in 1985 on a religious compound in a remote village in the state of Kedah, where a Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party stalwart, Ibrahim Mahmood, was preaching, and the subsequent killing of 18 people during the raid.⁷⁰ The continual suppression of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party by the Malaysian government eventually led to the creation of the jihadi-Salafist group, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, which will be discussed further in the next section.⁷¹

Up until the formation of Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, Malaysian jihadi-Salafists had been extremely reluctant to consider carrying out acts of violence within Malaysia.⁷² This might partially explain the Malaysian government's arguably inconsistent approach to jihadi-Salafists before September 2001. Some groups had been clinically monitored and suppressed by the government, as the 1985 Kedah incident demonstrated, but the government was also wary about the extent to which it suppressed these groups and was cautious about just how far it would take its political attacks on the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party.

Moreover, until the September 2001 attacks and the subsequent investigations by US and Malaysian authorities, Malaysia had not aggressively pursued the presence of foreign jihadi-Salafists in Malaysia, such as those in JI or al Qa'ida.⁷³ One can only assume that whatever level of awareness Malaysia had of JI and al Qa'ida operations before September 2001, they were deemed at that stage to be of insufficient threat, presumably because it was judged that they would not launch attacks in Malaysia and did not threaten Malaysian interests, notwithstanding how freely these groups had been carrying out their activities.⁷⁴

Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia

Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia was established in October 1995 by Zainon Ismail and six other veterans of the conflict in Afghanistan against the Soviets.⁷⁵ Its main objectives were the overthrow of the Malaysian government and the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia, and thereafter a Southeast Asian Islamic caliphate.⁷⁶ The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party was seen as the only Malaysian political party that subscribed to a sympathetic ideology consistent with that of Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, and both had some overlapping membership.⁷⁷ Accordingly, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia constructed an operations network to defend the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, should the Malaysian government crackdown on it, which included buying weapons, including M16s, AK-47s and hand grenades, utilising connections in Indonesia and Thailand.⁷⁸

Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia was a violent jihadi-Salafist group and had a number of operational cells, the most active of which was the Selangor cell led by Zulkifli Abd Hir, an Afghanistan veteran and friend of JI's Hambali, who he had first met in Afghanistan.⁷⁹ The Selangor cell was responsible for an attempted bank robbery, the murder of a Penang politician who was believed to have persuaded young girls to convert to Christianity, and an attempt to seize weapons from a police station. Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia was uncovered when a

Malaysian was arrested for an attempted shopping mall bombing in Jakarta in August 2001, which exposed the cross-border dimension to its activities.⁸⁰

After September 2001, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia's activities were severely curtailed in the crackdown by Malaysian authorities on JI and al Qa'ida, which included the arrest of its most senior leadership.⁸¹ However, claims by analysts such as Peter Chalk that Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia is defunct would seem premature.⁸² Rather, 'dormant' might be a more accurate term. This is because it is likely that some members joined JI and, similar to the early heralding of Darul Islam's extinction in Indonesia—which turned out to be incorrect, there is every possibility that former members remain in contact and may re-emerge either in other jihadi-Salafist groups or in a re-formed Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia.

Of course, the banner of jihadi-Salafist groups does not matter so much as their objectives, intent and capabilities. To reinforce the point that former Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia members remain dangerous, it should be noted that an ISIS-inspired cell had formed in Kuala Lumpur under former Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia member Murad Halimudin, also known as Murad Sudin. When he and 19 other experienced jihadists were arrested in August 2014, it was discovered that ingredients for explosives had been purchased and discussions had occurred about bombing bars, discos and a prominent brewery.⁸³

JI and al Qa'ida in Malaysia

During the years that the Indonesian fugitives Sungkar and Bashir were sheltered by Malaysians for their former Darul Islam activities, both continued their preaching and had a profound influence on a select group of Malaysian youths.⁸⁴ JI was formed in January 1993 by Sungkar while he was in Malaysia.⁸⁵ From its Malaysian headquarters, Sungkar, Bashir and Hambali went about establishing a regional terrorist group that would eventually have active cells in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and The Philippines.⁸⁶ Members were dispatched to al Qa'ida training camps and to JI camps that were established in Afghanistan and The Philippines, as well as to training camps of other jihadi-Salafist groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in The Philippines.⁸⁷ Notably, the connections between JI and Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia strengthened during this period, with the Selangor cell of Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, for example, occasionally inviting Bashir and Hambali to talk at its meetings.⁸⁸

JI was not the only foreign jihadi-Salafist group operating out of Malaysia before September 2001, and al Qa'ida used Malaysia to hold meetings, invest and transfer money and allow members to receive medical treatment. Crucially, the last planning meeting for the September 2001 attacks was held in Malaysia. Al Qa'ida also established relations with Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia and JI in Malaysia.⁸⁹ The paragraphs above demonstrate the multiplicity of links between different jihadi-Salafist groups that date back decades, many having formed in the mujahidin war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The mutual benefits for cooperation between these groups extend to training, logistics and ideological comfort. Indeed, it is these bonds of friendship and brotherhood that make wiping out jihadi-Salafist groups almost impossible in Southeast Asia.⁹⁰

Malaysia's operational and ideological responses to jihadi-Salafist groups

Malaysia's security response after the September 2001 attacks and then the Bali bombings of October 2002 is widely acknowledged as being operationally successful. The same cannot be said for its response to the ideological threat.⁹¹ Operational successes have been founded in effective intelligence measures from the likes of the Malaysian Police Special Branch, the ruthless application of the *Internal Security Act* and its strong investigative and detention powers, and targeted regional and international cooperation with intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Strikingly, however, it took the events of New York, Washington DC and Bali to prompt the Malaysian authorities to aggressively move against the likes of JI and al Qa'ida. Malaysian authorities had long been aware of the presence of Indonesian JI leaders opposed to the Suharto regime but, because they had not attacked any Malaysian targets, the group had operated relatively freely.⁹²

The Malaysian response to the ideological threat posed by jihadist-Salafism has not been as equally vigorous or successful as its operational responses. There are several reasons for this. The United Malays National Organisation government has used accusations of Islamism to pressure the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party but, at the same time—and this is almost contradictory, has attempted to establish stronger Islamic credentials and be seen as more Islamic than the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party.⁹³ This has occurred in an environment where, in recent years, Malay Muslim chauvinism has continued to entrench itself in Malaysian politics, to the detriment of Malaysian democracy and possibly to the advantage of jihadist-Salafism.⁹⁴ Joseph Liow argues that this exclusivist climate is a breeding ground for organisations such as ISIS, asserting that:

Islam casts a pale shadow over Malaysia today not because it is Islam, or even Islamism per se, but because its proponents are articulating a particularly exclusive brand of Islam that is divorced from the religion's historically enlightened traditions, and which has no intention to encourage pluralism or compromise.⁹⁵

It is this same exclusivist climate that has allowed so called 'peaceful Salafism' to provide a legitimising comfort for jihadi-Salafists. In a climate where the United Malays National Organisation's Supreme Council member Annuar Musa can brag that his prejudice is fine because it is based on Islam, the lines between violent and non-violent Salafism are easily blurred.⁹⁶ Peaceful Salafists need to be clear in their thinking and recognise that religious prejudice and exclusivism give the jihadi-Salafists hopes that an Islamic utopia within Malaysia is in reach.⁹⁷ An answer to this dilemma may be found in *Rukun Negara* (Malaysia's declaration of 'national principles'), which is discussed further in Part 6 of this paper.

Part 4: The Philippines

Poor governance, Muslim suppression and separatism

As discussed earlier, the history of Moro dispossession and disenfranchisement from the political process and economic systems led to the creation of a Muslim independence movement in the late 1960s. The independence movement transitioned to an armed insurgency after several massacres of Muslims at the hands of government security forces, including one where 70 Muslims were killed, some of them women and children, at a mosque in the province of Cotabata in Mindanao in June 1971.

The complex mixture of financial and social neglect, as well as racial and religious hostility from the central government towards the Moro, meant that many of the grievances held by the separatists were justified.⁹⁸ Tellingly, however, this fed into the narrative of Muslim persecution that was spreading throughout the Islamic world in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁹

In his study on the evolution of al Qa'ida and other jihadi-Salafist groups, Seth Jones explains that their spread in Africa and the Middle East has occurred where weak governments have failed to establish law and order, permitting militant groups and other sub-state actors to fill the vacuum, asserting also that:

State weakness is particularly likely in remote areas, where insurgent and terrorist groups can establish rural strongholds. The more extreme the decline or absence of authority in a region, the more the population becomes 'virgin territory' for those who would become an alternative government. Weak governance fuels alternative power centers, and warlords often flourish. Poor governance also increases the likelihood of insurgency and terrorism because the state's security forces are weak and lack popular legitimacy.¹⁰⁰

Jones could easily be describing the situation in the southern Philippines over the last 50 or so years rather than regions of Africa or the Middle East. And just like in the remote and poorly-governed areas of Africa and the Middle East, international opportunists have moved into the islands, hills, forests and coconut farms of the southern Philippines. For at least two decades, the southern Philippines has become an important area for regional and global terrorist groups such as JI and al Qa'ida. Remote areas in this region have become training grounds for Indonesians, Malaysians, Singaporeans, Thais and Arabs who subscribe to jihadist-Salafism.¹⁰¹

The Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

The Moro National Liberation Front started in Jolo in 1969 and quickly spread across the Sulu Archipelago and Central Mindanao.¹⁰² In the mid-1970s, a brutal separatist war ensued between it and the central government under President Ferdinand Marcos, resulting in an estimated 50,000 deaths, many of them non-combatants, killed by either the insurgents or the military.¹⁰³ The conflict then simmered somewhat as a result of international pressure, before the Libyan leader Muamar Gaddafi brokered a treaty between the two sides in 1976.¹⁰⁴

While the skirmishes never entirely ceased, by 1989 the government agreed to grant much of the region limited self-rule under the auspices of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Notably, under the agreement, approximately 7500 former Moro National Liberation Front combatants joined the Philippine Armed Forces or police by 2010, bringing employment and social benefits to the Moro people but also operational benefits to the security forces, given the knowledge of local culture, terrain and insurgent tactics that the new recruits brought with them.¹⁰⁵

However, the granting of autonomous region status, which brought only limited autonomy, was not enough for all Moro people. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front was a breakaway group which formed in 1981 after disillusionment with the autonomy agreement.¹⁰⁶ Significantly, several hundred Moro Islamic Liberation Front members went to Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s to either fight against the Soviets or train at al Qa'ida or JI camps, which provided the Moro Islamic Liberation Front with greater fighting capacity and a core of members who had been exposed to al Qa'ida-style jihadist-Salafism. On returning, some of these members opened terrorist training camps in Central Mindanao; notably, several JI members involved in the Bali bombings had been trained or conducted training at these camps.¹⁰⁷

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front suffered a high number of casualties in the early 2000s after President Joseph Estrada ordered a large military offensive. Then, in 2003, their founding leader died and was replaced by a more moderate leader, Ebrahim el Haj Murad, who dropped the demand for independence and commenced peace talks with the government.¹⁰⁸ These talks eventually led to a peace deal which was signed in late March 2014, known as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, which paved the way for an autonomous Bangsamoro (Moro homeland) region in Mindanao to replace the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.¹⁰⁹ However, the agreement has yet to be ratified by the Philippines Congress, not least because it may usher in a form of 'federalism' not favoured in Manila.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, no peace deal has yet proven acceptable to the myriad groups in the southern Philippines. Neither the Moro National Liberation Front nor the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which now both favour autonomy over independence, have been able to set aside their lingering ill will.¹¹¹ Both are divided along linguistic and tribal lines in a culture of clan and land rivalries where these factors are never far from the surface.¹¹² With divisions such as this among the groups of the southern Philippines, members of Congress might quite rightly ask whether any deal can hold and whether there can be a united Moro voice. This question is even more valid when considering breakaway groups such as Abu Sayyaf and their motivations.

Abu Sayyaf Group

Abu Sayyaf Group, a splinter group from the Moro National Liberation Front, was formed in 1991 under the command of Abdurajak Janjalini.¹¹³ It was formed with the help of al Qa'ida and, from its inception, adhered to a more virulent version of jihadist-Salafism.¹¹⁴ Its stated goals are the eradication of Christian influence in the southern Philippines and the creation of an independent Islamic state of Mindanao.¹¹⁵ While it has a reputation for raising money from extortion and kidnappings, it has also been involved in several high-profile attacks, including the firebombing of a ferry in Manila in February 2004 which killed 116 people—believed to have been carried out in conjunction with JI—and a series of bombings on Valentine's Day in February 2005.

There was also a particularly audacious plan, known as Oplan Bojinka, albeit foiled in 1996, which was believed to have been coordinated by Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind behind the 1993

attack against the World Trade Center in New York. It was a multi-targeted plan seeking to assassinate the Pope and President Clinton, bomb US embassies in Manila and Bangkok, and explode US commercial aircraft mid-air on trans-Pacific routes. The plan was foiled after volatile explosives ignited a fire in an apartment Yousef was renting in Manila.

Abu Sayyaf Group was considered such a threat that in 2001 the US dispatched Special Forces to The Philippines under Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to offer expertise in counter-terrorism operations and train the Philippine Armed Forces. US Special Forces stayed in The Philippines for over a decade and, by 2014, Abu Sayyaf Group's operational tempo and ideological unity were substantially degraded.¹¹⁶ In recent years, some terrorism experts have contended that Abu Sayyaf Group has become a mere kidnap-for-ransom gang.¹¹⁷ However, such assertions are perhaps premature.

First, as the history of the region has demonstrated—and as this paper has recounted in regards to the likes of Darul Islam in Indonesia—the links between many jihadi-Salafist groups are deep, the borders in the region are porous, and groups have a tendency to re-emerge in one form or another after having been written off by experts and governments alike. Indeed, Abu Sayyaf Group recently demonstrated that it continues to have the intent and capability to directly oppose the government of The Philippines when it engaged troops from the 44th Infantry Special Forces Battalion in a battle that lasted for almost ten hours and killed 18 soldiers for the loss of five Abu Sayyaf Group members.¹¹⁸

Second, Abu Sayyaf Group has been one of the more 'ideologically extreme' jihadi-Salafist groups in Southeast Asia and it would be foolish to dismiss the ideological attraction of ISIS to Abu Sayyaf Group, and vice-versa. Notably, in early January 2016, Abu Sayyaf Group announced its allegiance to ISIS, while ISIS has declared Abu Sayyaf Group's Isnilon Hapilon the leader of ISIS in The Philippines.¹¹⁹

Prospects for the peace process, the new President and points of vulnerability

The Government of The Philippines and the Philippine Armed Forces have respectively achieved some political and military successes since 2001 but there are a number of challenges on the horizon. The peace process is stalled in Parliament and will need the backing and priority of the new president. It is positive that President Rodrigo Duterte, as a former mayor of Davao City, comes to the presidency with a view of the conflict that is based in his Mindanao roots, which is likely to be very different to that of someone from metropolitan Manila or The Philippines' elite who have studied in the US.¹²⁰ Duterte's desire to find a political solution is widely known and he also seemingly has the respect of the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

However, while the withdrawal of US Special Forces demonstrated a belief that the Philippine Armed Forces are capable of dealing with Abu Sayyaf Group, recent clashes may lead to a conclusion that this was not the best course of action. And Abu Sayyaf Group is not the only group that remains intent on pursuing a separatist agenda by violent means. Finally, whether the Government of The Philippines is doing enough to tackle the ideology of jihadist-Salafism remains in doubt, especially in the correctional facilities which house a significant number of extremists following years of insurgency and terrorism.¹²¹ These points of vulnerability may provide an 'open gate' for an opportunistic jihadi-Salafist group to stroll through, with early indications suggesting that ISIS may very well do so.

Part 5: The penetration of ISIS into Southeast Asia

It is not centrally important now to determine whether Islamic State has a direct role in terrorist outrages carried out in its name. Islamic State is a perfectly postmodern organization in the service of perfectly medieval ideas. It is a flat structure, a social media movement, a cyber reality. It not only crowd funds, it crowds and clouds recruits. It sends its instructions through cyber space to a million atomised recipients who nominate themselves as actors in the Islamic State drama. This does not make its actions incoherent or random. Rather, it is the contemporary mutation of asymmetric guerilla warfare.¹²²

ISIS in Indonesia

The emergence of ISIS has had an invigorating effect on jihadist-Salafism in Southeast Asia, raising fears about more violence, shifting tactics and the potential for new cross-border alliances.¹²³ Estimates of how many foreign fighters have left Indonesia to fight with ISIS in Syria and Iraq vary. Sidney Jones, who specialises in the study of terrorist groups in Indonesia, has suggested that as at January 2016 the number was most likely between 250 and 300, although some of these have since been killed and many do not intend to return to Indonesia.¹²⁴

Since June 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced his caliphate, Indonesians—like many jihadi-Salafists from all over the world—have been drawn to Syria and Iraq, believing the Middle East to be the place where they can best defend and expand the caliphate.¹²⁵ The Internet and social media have been important in drawing these fighters from Indonesia but so has face-to-face-recruitment from within groups that existed before the formation of ISIS.¹²⁶

As at late 2015, it was estimated that at least 60 Indonesian foreign fighters may have returned home.¹²⁷ This figure could increase markedly if ISIS's leadership in Syria and Iraq tasked members of its Indonesian cadre to return home, where their leadership credentials, ideological commitment and combat experience would pose a high-level of threat to law and order in Indonesia.¹²⁸ In any event, the Indonesian Police believe the attacks in Jakarta in January 2016 were masterminded from Syria by Bahrudin Maim, an Indonesian previously convicted of terrorism in Indonesia, demonstrating that ISIS can reach in from afar and motivate home-based jihadi-Salafists to murder.¹²⁹ Indonesia now must face the prospect of increasing attacks by ISIS-linked or -inspired groups.

ISIS in Malaysia

There are an estimated 100 Malaysians with ISIS in Syria and Iraq.¹³⁰ Many of them are fighting in a Malay combat unit, the *Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyyah* (the Malay Archipelago Unit of the Islamic State).¹³¹ It is comprised mainly of Malaysians and Indonesians, and provides a social network to help Southeast Asians settle in and train, and is believed to act as a network between pro-ISIS groups operating in Syria and Iraq.¹³²

Just as the return of fighters from the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan acted as a catalyst for jihadi-Salafist violence in the 1990s, and networks established in that conflict proved difficult for Southeast Asian authorities to combat, the potential threat in Malaysia and elsewhere in the region posed by hardened militants returning with deep ideological commitment and frontline battle experience should not be dismissed.¹³³

However, the threat of returning foreign fighters is not the only one that ISIS presents to Malaysia. The idea and phenomenon of ISIS has spread through the Internet and social media and has inspired jihadi-Salafists to conduct attacks outside of Syria and Iraq, as demonstrated by recent atrocities in Orlando, Dhaka, Ankara and Nice.¹³⁴ The Malaysian Special Branch has reportedly prevented nine plots to launch attacks in Malaysia since 2014 but two recent events suggest they will continue to be tested.¹³⁵ A Malaysian, Mohd Rafi Udi, was seen in a graphic ISIS propaganda video released in June 2016 with two other ISIS fighters—believed to be an Indonesian and Filipino—beheading three Middle Eastern-looking captives somewhere in Syria or Iraq.

The consequences of this are quite concerning for authorities across Southeast Asia. Udi had not been considered 'extreme' by authorities, even when he had been a member of *Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia*. This highlights the danger of the poisonous ideology of ISIS elevating existing jihadi-Salafists to even higher levels of barbarity. If videos like this inspire jihadi-Salafists in Southeast Asia to adopt similar practices, the months and years ahead may well see numerous lethal attacks. The second recent incident of concern was a grenade attack in late June 2016 on a Malaysian nightclub that wounded several people and was claimed by ISIS.¹³⁶ These incidents demonstrate that ISIS poses a serious threat to Malaysia.

ISIS in The Philippines

The announcement by ISIS in January 2016 that it had formed a Southeast Asian province, or *wilayat*, in The Philippines seems to have raised concerns among The Philippines' neighbors, including Australia, but not so much in The Philippines itself.¹³⁷ The Philippines has tended to treat evidence of ISIS flags and propaganda material found among its existing jihadi-Salafist groups as being at best indicative of some level of ISIS support but not necessarily conclusive of an actual ISIS threat, which of itself is logical.

However, with the reciprocal pledges of allegiance by ISIS and Abu Sayyaf Group leader Isnilon Hapilon earlier in 2016, more concerned expressions might have been expected from The Philippines' government. Abu Sayyaf Group is, after all, a group with a long history of violence and ideological commitment, and yet The Philippines seems to be in denial about the reach of ISIS into its borders.¹³⁸

This leaning towards denying the threat of ISIS within The Philippines by Philippine officials is concerning because it shows a disconnect between officials in the region, which does not bode well for future cooperation between security agencies. The video in which Udi leads a triple beheading also involved him encouraging Southeast Asians who could not make it to Syria or Iraq to unite under the leadership of the southern Philippines-based Isnilon Hapilon. This video and call-to-arms led the chief of Malaysia's police counter-terrorism unit, Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, to say the video was not just propaganda but represented a serious threat. In stark contrast to Pitchay, Philippine military officials dismissed concerns about the prospect of deadly ISIS-directed or -inspired attacks in the region, saying the video was just propaganda and should be ignored.¹³⁹

Violent movements do not die easily and when forced out of one redoubt they tend to move to another, if not physically, then at least emotionally and spiritually. If ISIS increases its focus on Southeast Asia as it loses ground in Syria and Iraq, the countries of the region will need to drastically increase their levels of cooperation.

Part 6: What can Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines do to mitigate the threat of jihadist-Salafism?

Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines have each had operational successes against jihadi-Salafist groups but the challenges they face are immense, especially with the growing scourge of ISIS-inspired terrorism. Even a comprehensive military defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq will not mean that jihadist-Salafism there, or anywhere else, has been quelled. ISIS is not the only jihadi-Salafist group in Syria and Iraq, or Southeast Asia for that matter. Therefore, a comprehensive operational, policy and ideological effort must be constructed, coordinated and implemented.

The combination of existing groups which have never been defeated in Southeast Asia, with the penetration of ISIS into the region, means Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines must invest further time, intellectual endeavor and resources if they are to maintain law and order. Four broad areas where further effort is required stand out, being robust, coordinated and clearly delineated police and military responses within the countries themselves and also across borders; enhanced correctional services; strong and nuanced policy and legal responses, including tacking the ideology itself; and an enhanced diplomatic effort in Southeast Asia and beyond.

The operational responses of the security forces

While Indonesia's national police counter-terrorism unit, Detachment 88, has had impressive operational successes against both JI and ISIS, it has an immensely challenging job, made even more difficult as the Indonesian Parliament has not given its police the same level of intrusive powers that many other countries have, such as Malaysia, the US and France.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the Indonesian military needs to complement, not compete with the police in the area of counter-

terrorism. This is especially important for an emerging democracy that needs to maintain social harmony and is not long out of the grip of military dictatorship.

Malaysia has robustly employed its police force, especially its Special Branch, against jihadi-Salafist groups over many years. However, in recent years, concerns have surfaced about some members of the military, including special forces soldiers, as well as some civil servants, having links with ISIS, with a number arrested and the subject of investigation.¹⁴¹ Malaysia needs to urgently address this issue of the radicalisation of officials, lest the numbers grow, especially in its military. In its current political and social climate, which is sympathetic towards Salafism, this will not be an easy task.

In The Philippines, its armed forces have generally taken the lead in combating jihadi-Salafist groups. Their aggressive approach has at times paid dividends, and successful operations by the Philippine Armed Forces have aided the central government in furthering peace talks. However, even in recent years, the Philippine Armed Forces have suffered some significant battlefield losses against jihadi-Salafist groups, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, as in Indonesia, at times rivalry between the military and the police in The Philippines presents obstacles to operational success, which is not helped by what appears to be a position of denial by some when it comes to the penetration of ISIS into the country.¹⁴²

Correctional services

Prisons are a particular problem in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines, and the ability for jihadi-Salafists to mix in prison and radicalise others poses a real challenge for correctional service authorities.¹⁴³ These authorities face a myriad of challenges, not least the training and professionalism of their workforce; there is also room to exercise greater control over the activities of inmates.¹⁴⁴ With hundreds, if not thousands of jihadi-Salafists imprisoned in the region, their activities during the time they spend incarcerated, and their level of commitment to jihadst-Salafism on release, will have an influence on the law and order outlook in the region for many years to come.

In Indonesia, for instance, prisons have proved a breeding ground for jihadi-Salafists. This has occurred because of corruption, overcrowding, limited intelligence gathering and poorly-trained and -paid staff.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the grave law and order challenges posed by releasing convicted terrorists back into the community, possibly more radicalised than when they entered, was on display during the Jakarta attacks in January 2016. Police have confirmed that not only was the mastermind a former convicted terrorist operating out of Raqqa, Syria, but that the financier was released from prison in 2012 and is also in Syria; one of the attackers had also only been released from prison in 2015.¹⁴⁶

This raises a series of questions about these men and the operation they carried out, as well as broader policy questions about radicalisation in prisons. These include but are not limited to what contact with jihadi-Salafists did each of the three have when in prison; if they had contact with jihadi-Salafists, was it being monitored and why was it allowed; what, if any, threat assessments are done prior to the release of convicted terrorists; what ongoing monitoring and intelligence activities do Indonesian police undertake once a convicted terrorist is released from prison; and what, if any, countering violent extremism and de-radicalisation programs are delivered in the prison system? These are questions not just for Indonesian correctional service authorities but for those of Malaysia and The Philippines as well.

The legal, policy and ideological responses

Adam Fenton and David Price have argued that Indonesia's legal and policy response to the threat of jihadist-Salafism has been slow and piecemeal.¹⁴⁷ As mentioned above, Indonesia has not given its police the same level of intrusive powers that many other countries have. Further, no laws have yet been passed to outlaw support for jihadist-Salafism, and it appears that authorities are limited in regards to what actions they can take when ISIS supporters conduct rallies or meet at mosques.¹⁴⁸ Indonesia needs to react sooner rather than later to put in place a strong legal and policy framework to tackle jihadist-Salafism.

The legal framework for combating terrorism in Malaysia is much stronger than it is in Indonesia. Malaysia has historically had strong laws to deal with terrorism, and prior to the recently-enacted *Prevention of Terrorism Act*, the *Internal Security Act* was used aggressively by Malaysia's police to detain and investigate the activities of jihadi-Salafists.¹⁴⁹ The new law is even stronger, and suspects can essentially be detained indefinitely by a Prevention of Terrorism Board, whose decisions are not subject to external judicial review. While the *Prevention of Terrorism Act* has been criticised within Malaysia and internationally as being draconian, Malaysia's Prime Minister, Najib Razak, is unapologetic and has been quoted as saying that '[w]e will not wait until disaster strikes before implementing necessary preventative measures'.¹⁵⁰

In The Philippines, the legal and policy response to jihadi-Salafist groups has been hampered by the dominance of the security sector by the Philippine Armed Forces, judicial corruption and legislative inertia.¹⁵¹ Further, like Indonesia and Malaysia, there is room for an increased effort in combating the ideology of jihadist-Salafism and not just its violent symptoms.

Indeed, it is in the ideological arena that there is scope for all three governments to do more work. Notably, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib has recommended that for the countries of Southeast Asia, it 'is now time for us to enhance cooperation and the effectiveness of our de-radicalization programs'.¹⁵² Existing countering violent extremism and de-radicalisation programs have had mixed results, especially in the prisons.¹⁵³ However, the ideological debate in Southeast Asia will be a crucial battleground in the region's struggle against jihadist-Salafism, not just in prisons but in society more broadly. Critically, it may well be an arena in which the countries of Southeast Asia are well placed to excel.

Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines may well excel in the ideological arena because they can draw on long histories of moderate Islamic practices, combined with social, ethnic and cultural diversity. This moderate Islam has been a hallmark of the region's religious diversity and plurality. Indonesia's *Pancasila*, discussed earlier, and the Malaysian equivalent, *Rukun Negara*, have been the political philosophies underpinning statehood and good governance, anchored in principles of tolerance and humanity.¹⁵⁴

In future countering violent extremism and de-radicalisation programs across Southeast Asia, concepts such as *Pancasila* and *Rukun Negara* should be incorporated into the ideological debates. Indeed, President Joko Widodo of Indonesia recently indicated that *Pancasila* should be used to stop terrorism, extremism and radicalism while promoting peace, tolerance and diversity.¹⁵⁵

International cooperation and diplomacy

Jihadist-Salafism is an international problem that knows no borders and threatens many nations. Therefore, Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines would benefit from cooperating more closely with each other, as well as with other countries in Southeast Asia and further abroad as well. ASEAN has a history of producing action plans and statements of intent but it needs to go further in the fight against jihadist-Salafism and establish frameworks for cooperation that enable the member nations to work together closely, notwithstanding their historical concerns about non-interference in the affairs of others.¹⁵⁶

This enhanced cooperation could take many forms, such as the sharing of operational information and intelligence on target groups, or trilateral joint patrols in the Sulu and Celebes seas.¹⁵⁷ Enhanced cooperation between national financial intelligence units to stop the flow of terrorist funding is also critical.¹⁵⁸ Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines already do some of these things but further efforts to pool resources, share strategies and collaborate in a range of other areas, for instance on countering violent extremism and de-radicalisation programs, will benefit all three nations and the international community.¹⁵⁹

Conclusion

The world faces a global jihadi-Salafist insurgency that is now decades old. The diversity and lethality of global jihadi-Salafist attacks in the last two years alone appears to indicate that things

are getting worse, not better. Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines are far from immune to the global threat and, while they have made great strides against jihadi-Salafists since the attacks in New York and Washington DC in September 2001, the sheer scale of the problem means there are immense challenges ahead. While each country has experienced periods of relative peace, jihadi-Salafists are active again and arguably pose a greater challenge now than at any time in Southeast Asia's post-colonial history. Not only do home-grown groups and al Qa'ida affiliates endure but ISIS has penetrated the region.

The challenges posed by these jihadi-Salafist groups mean authorities in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines must build on their successes and do even more to combat jihadist-Salafism—operationally, policy-wise and ideologically. Merely imprisoning individuals and degrading the more violent groups will not be enough because this does little to confront the poisonous ideology. The spread of the ideology must be contained. Failure to do so will result in more attacks, more deaths, and law and order being undermined for the foreseeable future. The stability of all three states may even be threatened. Events in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia provide a dire warning of the consequences of under-estimating the threat.

Notes

- 1 Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy, *Joining the caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia*, Longueville: Sydney, 2005, p. xx; also Seth G. Jones, *A Persistent Threat: The evolution of al Qa'ida and other salafi-jihadists*, RAND Corporation: Santa Monica, 2014, p. 2.
- 2 Also known as Islamic State, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. For consistency, these other terms or their abbreviations will only be used when other sources are being directly quoted. For a detailed discussion on the lexical battleground concerning what ISIS should be called, see Asaf Siniver and Scott Lucas, 'The Islamic State lexical battleground: US foreign policy and the abstraction of threat', *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, January 2016, pp. 63-79.
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